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PHONE 02 9699 0333
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EDITORIAL

EDITOR

Anthony Fordham
<anthony@next.com.au>

DEPUTY EDITOR

Jere Lawrence
<jere@next.com.au>

ART DIRECTOR

Shari Davies
<sharid@next.com.au>

CONTRIBUTORS

Timothy C Best, Stuart Calvin, George Soropos, Steve Polak, Asher Moses, Ruth Lawrence, Victor Webster

CD EDITOR

Paul Noone
<ccdgod@next.com.au>

PHOTOGRAPHY

The Man in Black

ADVERTISING

NATIONAL ADVERTISING MANAGER
Chris C. Davey
<chrisd@next.com.au>

NATIONAL SALES DIRECTOR
Sue Ostler
<sue@next.com.au>

MANAGEMENT

PUBLISHER
Phil Keir

FINANCE DIRECTOR
Theo Fatseas

OPERATIONS MANAGER
Melissa Doyle

PRODUCTION CO-ORDINATOR
Monique Layt

SUBSCRIPTIONS

SUBSCRIPTIONS
PHONE 1300 361 146
FAX 02 9699 0334
EMAIL subs@next.com.au
ACN 002 647 645
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FAX 1300 650 777

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This month, I've been listening to horror stories. This is mostly due to the fact we've had a lot of games through the office that are highly dependent upon servers hosted by major ISPs such as Telstra.

Now we all know that such places are home to certain types of gamers who make our lives unpleasant, indeed I opined about this last month. But there's another creature out there that makes a wallhacking script kiddie seem nothing more than a minor irritation - I'm talking about Game Ops.

Consider if you will the kind of person who has supreme control over your gaming realm, thanks to a little parasite program he runs alongside his game session. With this program he can kick you, ban you, dump you from a match or prevent you from playing certain games or entering certain chat rooms. In a way this is good because the Game Op protects us from the afore-mentioned wallhacking script kiddies who only want to waste our time anyway. But what happens with Game Ops go bad?

It starts quite subtly - folks will be in a UT match casually sledging each other, just like they do on the normal unmoderated Internet servers, when suddenly someone will get booted and it's clear it was just because their creative insult didn't fit well with the Game Ops sense of what was appropriate. From them its a slippery slope to the following situations as told to me by more than one frustrated-to-tears gamer.

1. A match in which a newbie was booted for not being good enough, despite the fact that the server was clearly marked as a friendly server open to players of all skill levels.

2. A Game Op consistently winning on a server and sledging each and every person he fragged, then booting an arriving player who was clearly at a higher skill level and dared to sledge the Game Op when HE won.

3. A Game Op standing in a server screaming that everyone better watch themselves or get banned unless they showed him a bit of respect.

4. And the best one yet, a Game Op and his team losing at a Counter-Strike ladder match, then temporarily banning two of the opposing team's players so the Game Op and his team could secure a victory.

Were these isolated cases we could perhaps just shrug and move on, but this behaviour seems to be completely rife. Everyone I speak to has a horror story about a Game Op, and this horror story is always followed by a tale of frustration,

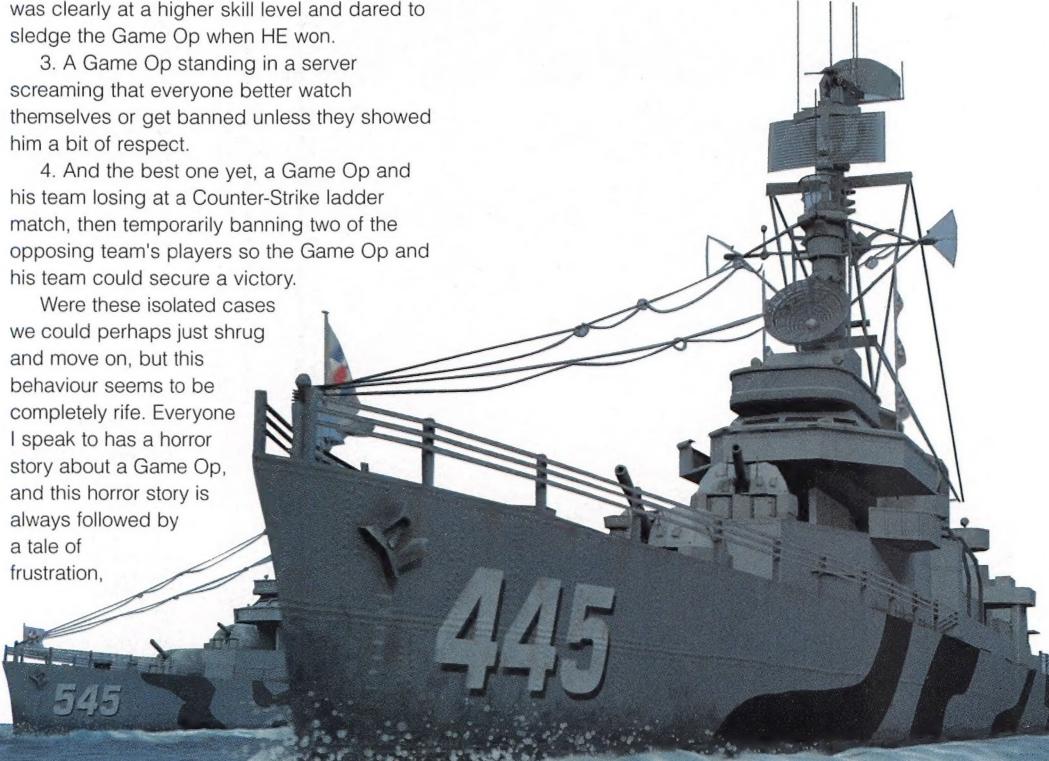
because - in the specific example of Telstra - there appears to be no one in the company with who even knows Telstra's gaming service Wireplay even exists, or at the very least it is impossible to talk to a Wireplay representative on the telephone.

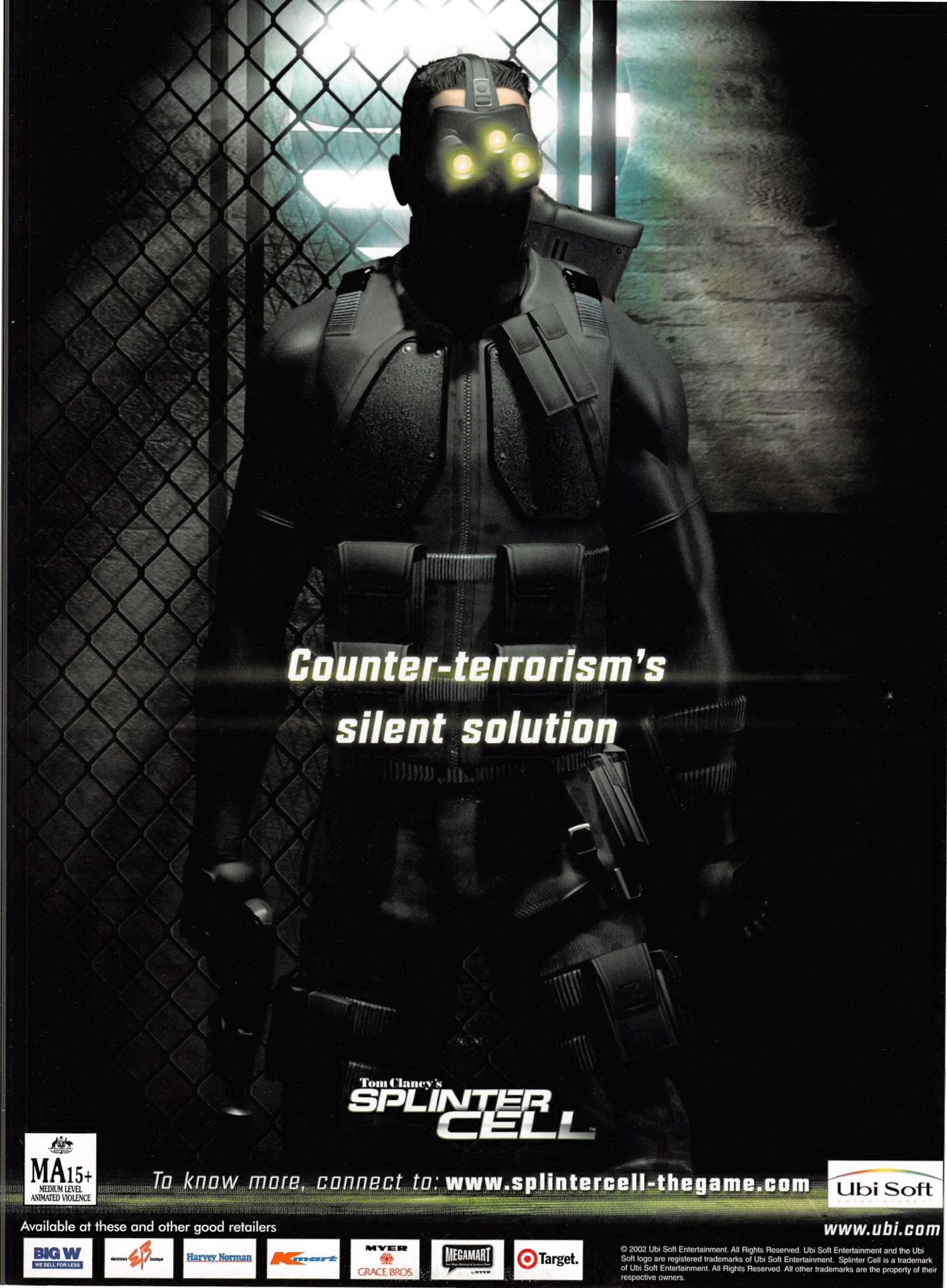
It is time for big business to understand that their gaming servers are no longer funny little free offshoots of the ISP. The gaming service is now a social venue for a large number of people who have a hobby they wish to pursue, safe in the knowledge that their \$20 - \$90 a month buys them some kind of security and assurance that they will be sheltered from the mess that is general gameplay on the Net at large. Besides which, it's transparently clear that with more than 100 game servers across a number of different titles, Telstra clearly believes their gaming arm to be a drawcard for subscribers.

So let's start demanding some professional service from this thing we pay for. They have our money, and if we use their service responsibly, it's reasonable for us to expect the same from them.

Oh yeah we also reviewed Unreal Tournament 2003 this issue. We like it, do you? Comments to the usual address, please.

Anthony Fordham
Editor
[anthonyf@next.com.au](mailto:<anthonyf@next.com.au>)





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letters@pcpowerplay.com.au

LETTER OF THE MONTH – CAPTAIN DE GROOT'S REVENGE

The point of this correspondence is to take you to task for a comment made in PCPP#77, page 38, Top 100 #86. This is the comment for Microsoft Flight Sim 2002 in which reference is made to crashing a 747 into the South Pylon of the Sydney Harbour Bridge as being a welcome bonus. Throw away comment I'm sure, but in light of Sept 11 and myself plus 80 other men call this pylon home in our working lives (SHB Maintenance), never mind the quarter of a million other daily users of the bridge, added to the fact the bridge was an identified possible target for terrorism less than 12 months ago, this kind of comment is far from responsible journalism.

There, I've said my piece and I shall go back to being the middle aged gaming enthusiast who ironically loves nothing better than to nightly play MOHAA and blast anything that moves with my shotgun. Ain't we humans a strange lot?

Geoff Wright

Ouch! Well yes indeed well said. There are many ways to respond to the attack on the WTC in New York, including instantly condemning games that depict actual terrorism, and also games that through the nature of their freeform gameplay allow simulated acts of terrorism to be enacted. But before the strike on the WTC, it was more or less de riguer that when you pulled the shrink-wrap off your latest edition of MS Flight Sim, you should immediately load up Chicago Miegs airfield, burn your Cessna down the runway, float into the sky and then crash immediately into an upper level of the Sears Tower. So isn't it just a little bit disturbing that until Sept 11 it never occurred to us that crashing simulated

planes into simulated buildings was anything more than a 'bit naughty' and we didn't think of all the thousands of simulated people we were slaughtering in doing so? And that only now, after actual planes have smashed into actual buildings in an actual scenario that takes about six minutes for even a MS Flight Sim novice to replicate, do we worry about the implications of what this otherwise innocuous piece of software allows us to do.

Perhaps the problem, such as it is, with games like MS Flight Sim is that they are not fantasy. Soldier of Fortune 2, in which heads explode like ripe watermelons and shards of bone stick into dynamic destructible 3D objects, is set in such a contrived gung-ho mercenary fantasy environment that the OFLC quite rightly did not refuse the game classification. On the other hand, Microsoft's decision to remove all plane destruction animations from Flight Sim 2002 seems like nothing less than an admission of guilt that their product is in some way evil and linked with the WTC attacks. Even though all right-thinking citizens know the game is completely innocent, it's ironic that the actual function of the game remains the same - you can still plan a detailed flight from Boston to New York and smash into the skyscraper of your choice. As a gamer however, I'm not going to feel guilty for smashing into buildings in MS Flight Sim 2002. I'm not killing people or committing acts of international terrorism. I'm just deliberately destroying a simulation of a \$35 million triumph of engineering for the sheer fun of it. Now excuse me, I'm going back to attempt to land a fully loaded 747-400 on a little dirt airstrip I found in Nepal. Again.



GHOST OF GAMING PAST?

Recently Blizzard revealed that they will be releasing Starcraft Ghost sometime around the end of 2003. This news at first was exciting until I read further into the details. Blizzard plans to release the game as a console game only, how could they!! The Starcraft world was created for and by PC gamers. How could Blizzard do this to their greatest Starcraft fans?! Blizzard must be made to realise that Starcraft Ghost should be released on the PC, to stay true to their greatest Starcraft fans.

Trapdoor

Because of Geoff's deep emotional pain and the fact that we like the sauciness of giving him a game in which a bridge is blown up in the first five minutes of play, he wins a copy of **Grand Theft Auto 3**, a game that couldn't possibly offend anyone.

It's undeniably a blow whenever we learn that a core PC developer is toying with a console title. However, by and large we are protected from most of the 'platform incest' that occurs in the non-PC portion of the gaming world, because the majority of our developers do stick exclusively to PC, or at most leave the console conversions to other companies. In the console world however, developers seem to be constantly switching between platforms - from GameCube to Xbox to PS2 and back (sometimes via Gameboy Advance) and this causes great distress to such folks as Steven Farrelly, editor of Nintendo Gamer.

However, it's true that Blizzard's decision to develop for console is disappointing, because (thanks largely to Korea) they sure as hell don't need the money. Hopefully we can rest assured

that Ghost will be a much more limited game than anything Blizzard has done on PC, that it is being developed by a secondary team and that most importantly work will not be delayed on Starcraft

TOO GOOD FOR THIS WORLD

My PC specs are as follows (Extremely high specs deleted to prevent nationwide outbursts of jealous rage - Ed) Yet, Grand Prix 4 looks absolutely garbage with all settings at their maximum. The cars look average, the crowd is made of cardboard, the trees are made of cardboard, the sound is average, plus there are framerate issues during the game. What ever happened to the word "quality".

The trouble is the games are not keeping up with the latest hardware. As far as I know, no current games even use half the features of the GeForce 4 Ti4600 video card. Why can't there be two versions of the game - High End or Low End, or have a system configuration utility for the game where you choose the settings?

Why aren't the games companies writing games to take advantage of the latest hardware? Effectively, the consumer is being ripped off. Then the websites to games like GP4 kindly ask you to download a 100MB patch to fix problems. Even other games like the Sum of All Fears and V8 Challenge look absolutely garbage. I expect a lot more graphical features for the price of games these days.

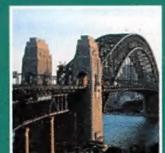
Basically, the games companies are not taking notice of High End system owners who want the games to look their best. I will not be buying any more games in future, unless they support Hardware Transform and Lighting or higher and other GeForce4 videocard features.

Rodney Mayhew

A constant source of amusement to we jaded observers of the world of entertainment electronics is the fact that about a year or so ago, PC hardware leapt spectacularly ahead of the demands games were putting on it. Equipped with nothing more than a GeForce2 Ultra, a 1GHz Duron and a decent wad of memory, there is no game currently available that you won't be able to run at its lowest graphical settings (Except a couple of obscure DirectX 8.1 only 'demo' games and the as yet unreleased Rallisport Challenge). Whack in a \$150 GeForce4 MX, and jerkvision is a thing of the past.

Unfortunately though, there are two harsh realities when it comes to system requirements and game features. The first is that the vast majority (and we mean VAST, like 90% according to the still incoming results of our survey) of PC gamers still struggle along on low-end machines, and that a TNT2 is toward the upper end of videocards found in the average machine. So even though Rodney (and of course PCPP) has access to the very bleeding edge of technology, the rest of the country simply doesn't.

The other harsh reality is that extra graphical



features - especially anything involving the use of vertex and pixel shaders - are extremely labour-intensive to develop and require a whole extra team employed at fabulous expense to, after all, do little more than put shine on shiny stuff. And in speaking to developers at E3 this year, Jere was surprised to learn that many teams are simply "not allowed" to put in extra graphical effects because they are instructed by publishers to program for the LCD - the Lowest Common Denominator.

As far as I can see there's a simple solution; become a billionaire and buy everyone in the market a high-end PC like yours, then the extra graphical effects shall come. Alternatively, you could just wait for another year in the hope that the rest of us catch up.

PC UNION NEWSLETTER?

After flicking through the last month's mag (PCPP#78), I have to say I'm a little disappointed. The article on page 30 (Privatise Richard Alston) is a blatant political statement thinly guised as an informative article on high definition TV/Internet services. The writer doesn't even attempt to take a neutral stance and just uses the article as a way of expressing his contempt for politics he opposes. Shit, I read enough of this crap in my monthly union newsletter, and I DON'T NEED IT IN MY GAMING MAG! (And please don't try to excuse it by quoting the little "disclaimer" that was printed at the end of the article - fact is, PCPP still printed the stuff, and that's my gripe).

If political stuff does have relevance in a gaming article, try to treat it as you have done so well in the past; as neutrally and objectively as possible, eh? I don't think we need the foaming at the mouth "Guerrilla Gamer" ramming his views down our throat each month. Your readers come from a diversity of various backgrounds, and no doubt have a range of political views. So, please keep the political bias out of your otherwise excellent mag - it has no place in a gaming publication! There - I've had my little whinge - thank you!

AReyeP

When we enlisted the services of the Guerrilla Gamer we knew his views were bound to rub some folks up the wrong way. However, as Australia's leading PC gaming magazine and the 'Journal of Record' for the hobby in this country, we recognise that not everything in Australia is peachy keen for gamers and we want to stimulate people into responding to these problems. And sometimes, reporting everything in objective 'journo-speak' makes it difficult for people to want to respond actively - they read an objective piece, they think "oh well, that's the way it is" and then never get upset. The Guerrilla Gamer's purpose is to get people upset. And hey, he's always published in the context of editorial comment so you know to take it with a grain of salt, right? Either that or take it to the hills... with a shotty. Don't believe anyone could ever possibly like the Guerrilla Gamer? Well then, read on:

BROADBAND ENVY?

I would like to thank the Editor of PC PowerPlay for publishing the article "Privatise Richard Alston" in PCPP#78. I think that it is important that the younger readers are made aware of the practices and policies of the current government and how they will effect our future. The further privatization of Telstra will mean that as a business Telstra would be less likely to expand its existing infrastructure for rural Australia due to pressure of shareholders. I believe that as Australians we should want the best for all of us. And instead of flogging off Telstra the Government (those people who are meant to act in our best interests) should put more money into upgrading the existing infrastructure so everyone can get access to broadband. Some people may argue that rural areas already have access to satellite internet but it's hardly the same level of service that people in the city areas enjoy with cable or ADSL. Even ADSL is limited to people who live close to an exchange and forget it if Telstra have installed pair gain lines in your street to save money.

Jeremy T

Well then Jeremy you will no doubt be tickled pink to learn than in Canada, which is many respects is almost socially identical to Australia, several different broadband providers offer ADSL to every home, with no installation fee and unlimited downloads for about AU\$30 a month. Oh yeah, and in Canada rent is really cheap. Bastards.

PLAY THAT FUNKY MUSIC, AMIGABOY

I was delighted to find the excellent retro game Xenon 2 featured in PCPP#77. I agree with you saying "the most memorable thing about Xenon 2 was the music." But I was shocked to read the following line "Why does Xenon 2 deserve to be remembered? Perhaps because it was one of the first truly arcade shooter experiences on PC." I would like to point out the following things to you: The Amiga version (Amiga 500 with only a 7 MHz processor and 512 K of RAM) had stunning music because the Amiga had sound hardware to produce music! Most PCs back in those days (early 1990s) did not have sound hardware or very few PCs had sound hardware because it was too expensive. The PC version of Xenon 2 did not have the music featured in the Amiga version because of the point given in number 2, therefore the PC version played a beeping noise through the PC speaker. Therefore I would like to conclude that it was remembered on the PC because it showed that the PC was not a good games system like the Amiga was and still is today. To prove my point I challenge you to download Xenon 2 for the PC and realise the mistake you have made. I am sorry to upset the author of the article but maybe that person should get their facts straight before you had the article published.

Mark Gare

Oh Lord not another Amiga evangelical. Yes, we're happy to confess that the Amiga was a fine machine in its time and wonderfully equipped for the many highly specific tasks it was able to perform. But the PC version of Xenon 2 did indeed

feature the music of Bomb Da Bass though, as you mentioned Mark, it would only work if the PC was equipped with an "Adlib Compatible Sound Card" (Remember that one folks?).

The issue of early ports being disappointing on the EGA-only PC back in the days of yore was an important one, and I can remember being awed by the sheer graphical splendour of Altered Beast on Amiga as compared to the PC's rather more modest Captain Comic. But then, eventually, VGA arrived, the 386 arrived and most importantly Wing Commander arrived and the rest, as we say, is history.

FRAG ME BUT DON'T HATE ME

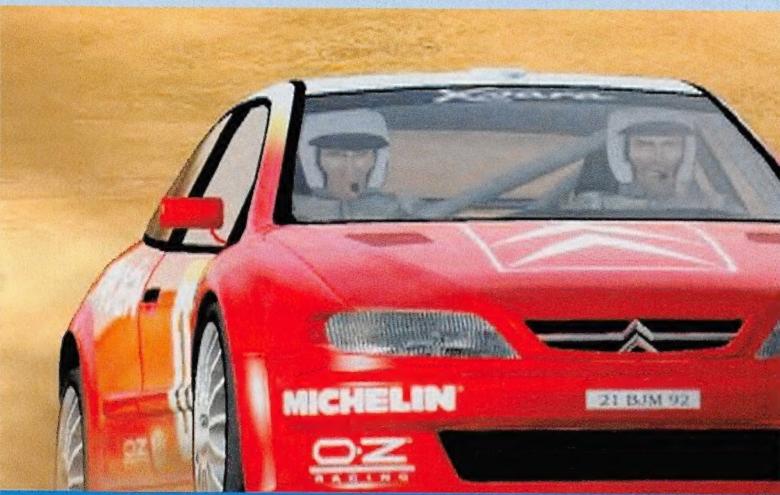
What is the go with people playing online games. It just seems every time that I log on for a bit of fragging action within a few minutes I am inundated with insults. I mean I love a bit of friendly competition and the occasional ribbing, but some of these gamers just go overboard. It's normally the case of you being too good or not good enough. I must say it's not so bad when you are totally kicking these online tough guys butts and you can silence their abuse with yet another headshot. But when you're just new to the game and you don't know the map back to front, it can be a bit disheartening. Come on guys, just remember when you first started playing online and you sucked big time, just enjoy the bliss of the newbie body count and leave it at that. I'm positive that the sheer humiliation of being continually fragged is enough.

By the way, love the mag. I don't know if I missed an issue but why have you guys not included (probably the best mod I've seen and played) Urban Terror, a mod for Quake 3 onto one of your demo discs?

Ben Gylys

Wherever there has been online play, there have been the little Shiatsus who seem to always want to spoil it for everyone. I recall one memorable 'game' of Quake on a regular server in which the majority of the regulars decided we'd kind of just have a bit of a chat rather than actually play (Quake: The IRC Client, remember THAT one folks?) and some oddball of a Queenslander popped in and proceeded to frag everyone over and over and over even though we clearly weren't fighting back. It became a sort of an experiment; the four of us wanted to see how many times he was prepared to kill us before he got bored and went looking for another server. And it wasn't like he was an unskilled player who was exploiting his only chance ever to win, the guy was really good, but killing was much more important to him than any sort of participation in our conversation. Well, killing and calling us lame. Eventually, after his 500th frag, I disconnected and went to bed.

As the editorial last month indicated, the behaviour of a slice of the online gaming community is gaming's great shame, and I guess all we can do as 'true' gamers is keep playing right and not letting the Shiatsus get the best of us.



So detailed you can actually see the husband/wife teams fighting



So detailed, you can actually see the endangered species choking on CO

RALLISPORT CHALLENGE

These kars kheep on going rownd and rownd, (10 points if you know the r





So detailed, there's a very real risk of frostbite



So detailed, your bum won't even look big in this

■ Developer: Dice ■ Publisher: Microsoft ■ Distributor: Microsoft ■ Due: Summer 2003

Fantasy/arcade racing games went through a mild resurgence in the mid nineties and secured the PC as a premium platform for motor-heads. Fast forward to the present and it's all F1/Nascar simulators that although a Godsend for the afore mentioned enthusiasts, left those of us who just want to drive around really fast and twitch our way to victory feeling rather left out.

Enter Rallisport challenge which besides being a blockbuster for the Xbox, awed us all with its incredible graphics and awesome speed. PC gamers start cackling now because the early dev code we saw running in Microsoft-land was not only as fast/faster as the Xbox version, but in all its 1024x768 glory was much cleaner, crisper and more intricately detailed.

Paragraph Sub Head

Described as an action driving experience, Rallisport Challenge gives you the opportunity to participate in fast-paced arcade style rally racing from dry African dirt tracks to the frozen roads of the Nordics (to just name a

couple). The ice-tracks in particular are quite amazing with bump-mapped snow and ice on the road that really gives the impression of a realistic environment. Other nice touches are that the ice-tracks translucently reflect the car off its surface and the magnificent sunsets of the Xbox version have been reapplied in all their golden-apricot glory - take one look at the ice-racing screenshots and you will instantly understand the graphical magnitude of this game.

Paragraph Sub Head

To appeal and impress more motor-literate players, "Microsoft has secured some of the world's best car manufacturers, allowing players to choose Audi, Suzuki, Citroen, Toyota and many other exciting models" revealed Microsoft Product Manager, Richard Hirst. "You can also indulge in your ultimate fantasy and handle an infamous 1980's 'Group B' car or choose from a huge assortment of modified version vehicles such as the Suzuki Grand Vitara or Toyota Tacoma Truck".

Paragraph Sub Head

Besides the beautiful terrains and exquisite texturing, RSC includes the kind of niceties that one can expect from a premium title including animals that wander out onto the road that need to be dodged, crowds that cheer on your progress and oodles of particle 3D effects such as mud splatters, snowflakes and rain drops.

Paragraph Sub Head

Multiplay is also fully supported and will allow for four players to race against each other over a LAN, or alternatively an as-yet undisclosed number of players can participate online over the Net. Hopefully this won't require use of Microsoft's Zone services.

Everything about Rallisport Challenge has impressed the PCPP team greatly. A lot of people thought it was amazing on the Xbox. Well, just wait until you see it in all its High Res ultra-performing glory. Let's face it; the pure power of the PC is a beautiful thing, not unlike the sunsets in this extraordinary game.

Jere Lawrence

Why Rallisport Challenge Deserves a Second Look:

Incredible textures and extremely stylish graphics.

Awesome racing model that is fun yet relatively realistic.

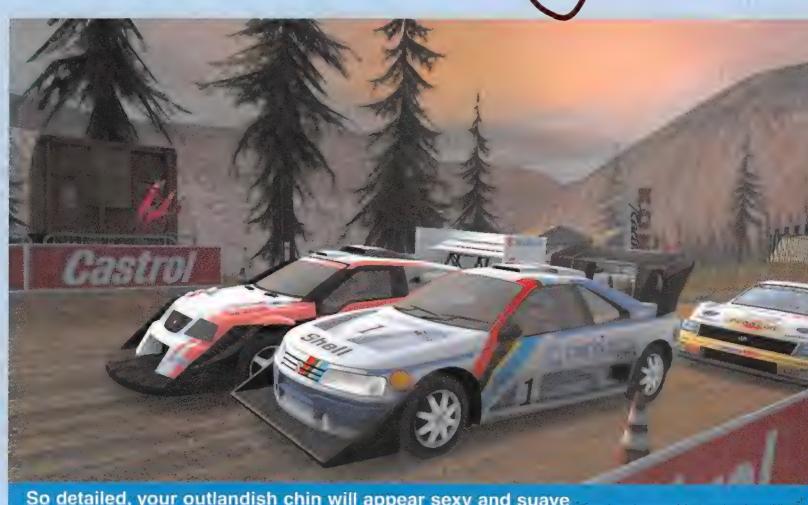
Realistic damage model. Doors swing open, bumpers come off.

Proper Multiplay support, no split screen nonsense.





So detailed, your pants will catch fire



So detailed, your outlandish chin will appear sexy and suave



Hmn, watch face is red, this must be a bad guy



What must it be like, living with Bond, not even able to lock yourself in the bathroom?

James Bond 007: NightFire

For when The World Is Not Enough, play computer games instead



A guy with a gun and two zombies in cocktail dresses. This must be one of those 'Society Dos' they talk about...



Imagine the possibilities...



Toilet cam? You people are sick!

■ Developer: Gearbox software ■ Publisher: Electronic Arts ■ Distributor: TBA ■ Due: 2002

It would seem strange given the long history of James Bond that in recent years more attention has been given to bringing the popular British spy to consoles than to our PCs. Finally, the time has come for 007 to learn the power of WASD and a mouse - strange console controllers be-gone!

Not Just a Pretty Face

Nightfire is more than just a standard fare run and gun first person shooter, a reality that is discovered from the very first level. Instead of the usual slow paced tutorials that accompany the beginning of many games, Nightfire lunges you straight into the action within a chopper where you have to strategically snipe at enemy cars to stop them from capturing one of the games protagonists. In the console/arcade world, the term "rail shooter" is used to describe these types of games where you're a passenger that doesn't initiate movement. Rather, the scene moves along at a set pace and you have to react to the events around you. In the opening scenes of the game this is used to full effect and

even requires an element of thought. For example, in one situation there are too many enemy vehicles to stop through the use of sniping. The solution which is subtly hinted at with a fast camera movement is to shoot the chain links of a crane and send steel girders crashing down around the enemies. It's these kind of little touches that lift this title from being samey and trite to well polished and captivating.

Location, Location, Location!

There are plenty of locations on offer in Nightfire that promise environments with different physics. There's the high altitude Austrian Alps, a low gravity space station as well as an underwater South Pacific level just to name a few. Navigation through the game is achieved through a first person perspective with the ubiquitous change of camera to third person for cut scenes. EA have gone to great lengths to promote the fact that Pierce Brosnan's image has been used for the Bond character, which is useful, if only because it gives you something to laugh at when you die.

Curiously, the PC version will differ from the console release which begs the question, why? A level where the player has to escape in a Bond car replete with all kinds of "Spyhunter" type gadgetry has been removed. To compensate, EA have stated that the PC version will have extra levels and locations instead.

Hand me my Shoe Phone

All is not lost in regards to gadgetry though. Within the game there will be numerous items that can be obtained from the Q-lab that will assist you in the mission. How you use your gadgets will also depend on play style. It's possible to complete a level through stealthy spycraft or a more frag orientated approach.

With interesting and varied gameplay, detailed well rendered graphics, numerous different locations, and online multiplayer functionality Nightfire is a full featured title that for FPS and 007 fans is worth getting excited about.

Jere Lawrence

Why Nightfire Deserves a Second Look:

Different environments with different gravity and conditions.

Q gadgetry

Varied gameplay with different things to do - stealth or guns blazing.

Bond women!!



Now that's just not nice



Mr Bond, your manliness sets my loins afire!



Spotlight

NEWS FROM ALL QUARTERS OF THE GLOBE

The Euro Trade Show

ECTS picks up the pace from last year's whimper



This year a huge effort was made to bring things back up to speed after a lacklustre show last year. Check out our coverage of NOLF 2, Blood Rayne, Empire Earth and Casino Empire, from the show.

This year the show moved to a new venue, Earl's Court, and, for the first time a consumer hall was added to proceedings so interested gamers didn't have to try sneak into the industry area.

EA kicked things off with a big pre-ETCS party showing off its Medal of Honour Expansion, Spearhead, Shox (its latest rally game), Sims Online and SimCity 4.

Out of the PC hardware heavy hitters, Nvidia put on the best show with booth babes taking photos with passers by and a suite of GeForce4-powered PCs running some of the most impressive titles of the show including: Unreal Tournament 2003, Tomb Raider: Angel of Darkness, Delta Force: Black Hawk Down, Breed, Battlefield 1942 and Tron 2.0.

Even though Nvidia didn't have a new card to show it still managed a fine show and gave games like Tomb Raider AoD a presence.

Intel was also there propping up the PC hardware side of things

showcasing its 2.8GHz P4s on some heavily modded display machines also sporting G4s and running UT2003 through its paces.

One of the strengths of ECTS is the ability to show local talent and Russian publisher C1 had several interesting games on show including Perimeter, (a RTS title based on terraforming) and Boarder Zone (an impressive looking-fantasy RPG).

Probably the strongest PC publisher at the show was, as unlikely as it sounds, Ubi Soft. It had the announcement of colourful platformer Rayman 3 up its sleeve and displays of Splinter Cell, Raven Shield and cell-shaded XIII drew the punters.

Other notable titles that were on show were Westka's latest build of Y-Project, Warhammer Online and Grin's Bandits.

EA's Medal of Honour Allied Assault won the PC game of the year as voted by ECTS goers on their website and Brat Designs's Breed was voted PC game of the show by a panel of games

journos (helped to the title by Doom III staying home).

Microsoft and Eidos pretty much stayed away and Nintendo, Vivendi, Lionhead, SCi and Empire all set up outside to steal the show's thunder.

Overall, ETCS provided another chance to catch many of the games that appeared at E3 and offered slightly later builds; on the downside, there were very few new major titles on show (other than Rayman 3 and Broken Sword 3 for PS2). In fact, the show was dominated by the PS2 taking a whole hall to itself - Sony's showing was billed as the PS2 Experience and came complete with hundreds of consoles and a Lara Croft model - while Xbox, Gamecube and PC games were relatively few and far between.

On the other hand, this year's showing was a definite improvement from last year and with increasingly interesting games coming out of far flung parts of Europe, like C1's games hopefully ECTS will pick up pace in the coming years and offer some more surprises next year.



Looks nice now, but give them an inch and they'll be fighting for Atari T-shirts



This isn't what it looks like



But will it be my friend?

No Games for You

Greece tries to ban gaming

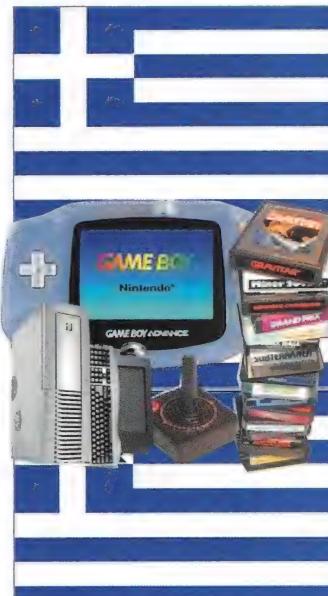
The Greek government lost its collective mind when it made it illegal to play computer games. This ban included Internet cafes, video arcades, home PCs, handheld games like Gameboys, and even games on mobile phones.

Proedriko Diatagma 174 is an extension of laws banning Internet gambling and has been in force since the end of July. Apparently, it is just too hard for the police to be able to determine what is illegal gambling and what is

innocence computer gaming.

If Counter Strike looks like an online Casino to the authorities, gaming is obviously all Greek to them. Fines range from 5000 to 75,000 euros (which is more than \$130,000) and offenders could be hit with a three-month stay in jail.

Two arcade owners stayed open despite the ban and were charged. Both cases came quickly to trial and both Judges dismissed the cases, ruling the law was unconstitutional.



Private Dancer

Let's See if Almost-Sex Sells

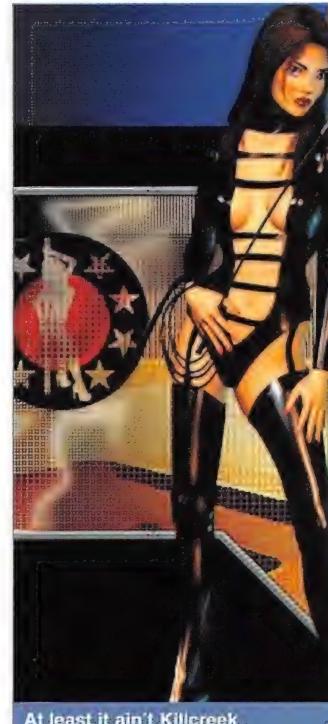
Private Dancer is set on the island of Los Amantes in the year 2959, but who really cares about any lame-arse back-story? Kaboom Studios has teamed up with Spearmint Rhino Gentlemen's Clubs to produce something a tad risqué.



In Private Dancer players gamble against Los Amantes's finest exotics dancers cum professional gamblers (Ouch - Ed). As you win, the girls cast aside their clothing as a part of their floor/pole routine.

The girl's movements and choreography have been motion captured from Spearmint Rhino's talented professions and are set to start pulses pounding.

Kaboom's Geoff Brown says it's all clean fun, with nothing more explicit than some of the things you can see on TV or in the tabloids ... namely being topless women doing some naughty dancing. Private Dancer is, er, looking good...



At least it ain't Killcreek

Broadband Schmordbrand

Alston speaks on Broadband



Our Communications Minister was recently interviewed by the ABC show Inside Business about broadband. Richard Alston said that our slow adoption, 3% compared to 9% or 10% for some European countries wasn't a concern.

He went on to say that some countries like South Korea had such high take-up rates because of one main factor: pornography. Apparently he

hasn't got the figures, but that's what he's been told and he's been there "and seen what's happening."

And since this appears to be the case he's not sure there is a compelling national interest in subsidising a broadband roll-out. There was no mention from our Minister of South Korea's competitive ISP environment, high population density or the phenomenal popularity of online-gaming there.

BYTESIZE

INTERNET MACCAFE

The first MacDonalds Internet Café in Australia has been opened in Melbourne. Customers can buy pre-paid cards, like phone cards, at the front counter or the McCafé and then hit the superhighway.

The Internet side of the business is being monitored daily to see how it's going and Macca's owners in other states have shown interest as well. Give me a \$15 card and keep the coffee refills coming ... And, NO! I don't want fries with that.

CHEATERS FREEZE

Blizzard has left 14,000 naughty players out in the cold for two weeks. These little sneaks were busted for using a hack for WarCraft III that let them see in enemy player's territories, giving them a huge competitive advantage. Not only have they received the two-week ban, but they have had their accounts reset, wiping their battlenet rankings (which can take months to build). It's a good think they cracked down on the hack before it got too widespread...

CONSOLES SUBS

After a drive by the Interactive Digital Software Association it has been announced that all 72 subs in the US fleet have a games console and a library of about 20 games. Lucky, that.

IDSA members coughed up 1,700 games for their undersea fighting men and women.

Kelly Powell of the "Mission Essential Branch, Morale, Welfare and Recreation Division, Navy Personnel Command" sent out a big thank you to the association.

RARE BUY

Allegedly Nintendo poster-boy Rare has been bought by Microsoft. Who? If you've played Golden Eye, Perfect Dark or Banjo Kazooie then you are familiar with their work. The deal is thought to be worth more than half a billion dollars, and worth it because just look what they did with the aging N64.

TOWER POWER

The federal government added its support (but no dollars as of yet) to building a structure nearly twice as tall as the tallest man-made structure in the world. It would be a 1km high tower connected to a 7km long collector surrounded by solar cells which would heat air to around 65C and use the principle that hot air rises to turn massive wind turbines and generate power. At night the solar cells would release heat to keep the turbine turning. The solar tower will be able to power approximately 200,000 homes and if all goes to plan should be completed by early 2006.

ATOMIC BITS

Scientists at the University of Wisconsin-Madison have created a system of memory that uses displaced silicon atoms to store information, in such a way that an atom in the line represents a 1 and a space represents a 0. This system works at room temperature and can be formatted like conventional memory with a memory density around a million times that of your standard CD-ROM. Don't get too excited yet, the technology is still years off. Currently, you need a scanning tunnelling microscope operating on the atoms in a vacuum to write data, and read speed is hugely slow (due to the data density).

SAM & MAX

In last month's issue we reported that the Sam & Max game was off the boil after the studio that was developing it, Infinite Machine, threw a cog and lurched to a grinding halt. Well, LucasArts have since put out a press release saying that Sam & Max rides again. Apparently they weren't willing to let a fan favourite go that easily. Lucas is developing the title in-house and you have to wonder how many members from Justin Chin's team will be picked up to work on it. If Justin is back at Lucas then he has come full circle after making a name for himself on the Jedi Knight series.



Desktop Dominance Challenged?

Sun, Red Hat want to make MS sweat

Sun Microsystems is known for its workstations and for developing the Java scripting language you have to thank for so many pop-up ads. Red Hat has been packaging Unix applications and offering support for years as a business alternative for running non-Microsoft servers.

Now both have been talking about largely open-source moves into the desktop biz. Since a lot of hardcore code monkeys distrust Microsoft there are open-source alternatives to most office suites and desktop applications. In fact, Sun's StarOffice is meant to be pretty handy and is available for Windows.

Previous attempts at making mainstream desktops move away from Windows have fallen by the wayside because of lack of standardisation, applications, games and support ... not to mention the Microsoft competition.

Red Hat has experience packaging open source applications for commercial use and Sun is one of the few hardware vendors without ties with Microsoft so both are in a decent

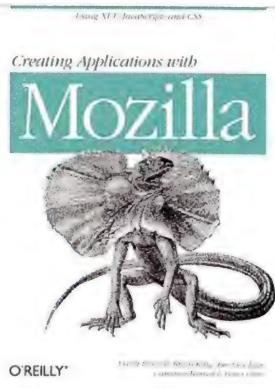
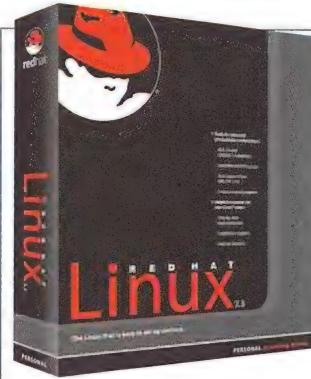
position to give it a fair shake.

Sun has also gone from calling Linux a "bath-tub of code" to releasing a Linux-based server which draws on Red Hat's offerings. In a recent briefing Sun's chief of technology said the company was leaning towards 64-bit Linux.

Sun has also said that it would try differentiating its Linux by incorporating some of the features of its Solaris workstation software like the improved fault management. This could mean a major donation of code to the open-source community. It already made such a donation when it developed its Network File System, which has now been commonly adopted by the Linux community.

Beyond all that, more games are coming out for Linux and Microsoft is introducing a new pricing structure which is making many companies and end-users nervous.

Several companies have expressed interest in going open-source but are they serious or just angling for a better deal from MS under the new pricing? Time will tell.



MS PC TV

Microsoft and HP bring on Entertainment Centre

Windows XP Media Center Edition



Expect more
from a home PC

- The best of computing and entertainment
- Preview the experience



Microsoft and Hewlett-Packard have announced that they are teaming up to make digital entertainment PCs. They will feature TV tuners, a DVR to record programs and Windows Media Center XP.

The system will allow users to access its media functions via a remote just like a TV or Stereo.

Microsoft says it is targeting people like students who don't have a lot of space but who want all of the entertainment bells and whistles. Set to cost between \$US1500 to \$US2000, they're in moderately pricey category.

The feature that has drawn most attention is the copy protection which means that any

recorded media is encrypted so it can only be played on the PC that created it.

This is a move by Microsoft to court movie makers and music companies but is sure to turn some users to other systems into which they have slapped a DVR and a TV tuner, which don't sport these limitations.

ARX FATALIS



"Absolutely flawless.
The in-game atmosphere is fantastic."

Action Trip

"Arx Fatalis succeeds where others have failed."

Overall Score: 8 (out of 10)

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MOLECULAR MEN

The R&D department at Hewlett-Packard have developed 64-bit memory chips which use molecular switches. To give you an idea of scale HP says that 1000 of these chips could fit on the end of a human hair. It is apparently such a breakthrough because it includes memory and logic components on a nano-scale chip. The memory is re-writeable and non-volatile (info stays when power switched off) and is fairly cheap to produce. Finally, this memory has about 10 times the bit density possible on silicon chips.

ANTI-PRIVACY BILL

A recent US Bill to stop banks selling financial information to 3rd parties for marketing purposes has failed by a margin of two votes. Why block such a bill? Well, the San Francisco Chronicler puts it down to approximately \$US20 million, which is on record, as being spent by big corporations, banks and insurance companies in lobbying and campaign contributions. One person on the Legislative Assembly who opposed a similar bill a couple of years ago received more than \$1 million in contributions largely on the strength of the bill. This is the largest amount spent on lobbying in state history.

HYPNO-PHONES

Tests at the Centre for Neuropsychopharmacology of the Swinburne University of Technology have found that the radiation from cell phones increases alpha-wave brain activity in much the same way as hypnosis. The test subjects had phones put next to their heads without being told if they were on or off. The subjects with the phones on experienced greater alpha wave activity and the test showed the more complicated the task they were asked to perform the worse the result became. Two words people ... hands free.



I of the Dragon

RPG with bite

Take to the skies on a reptilian wing and a smoky prayer. This is a role-playing game with a difference: you don't play no uppity Knight or wet-behind-the-ear mage, oh, no ... you're a dragon, baby. You get to fly around kilometres of landscape where you can deform terrain, level mountains and set forests ablaze.

There are three basic dragon types to choose from, each with different stats,



special abilities and fire, ice or acid breath, as well as over 60 spells. Players will be able to develop their characters along usual class lines, gaining experience and power as they battle over 40 nasty critters (and some not so nasty ones including the uppity knights).

Primal Software claims the game is almost done so it shouldn't be too long until your draconic fantasies can be given wings to fly.

Virtually You

Stand-in AI for Ballerium

Ballerium is a massively multiplayer online RTS game. Players start with a small force, make alliances and forge a name for themselves, eventually gaining enough strength to start a clan in their own right.

As the game progresses players wage war (and diplomacy) across a huge land and try to take control of the rare

artefacts that will ultimately allow your followers to get off the doomed world of Ballerium before it really goes down the tube.

In an environment like that, taking time off could really put players out of the running so the developers, Majorem, have developed an A.I. that studies the way players handle their business and then tries to emulate it.

This game looks at how quickly you expand, the type of units you favour, how aggressively or defensively you play and so on, so it's good news for players who excel in tactics and who don't want to get pounded by players who just excel in spending 24-7 online. Look for Ballerium mid 2003.

Command & Conquer: Generals

Westwood gets real



There is an upcoming film in which a little boy farts this... we're doomed



Investors buzzing the up-for-sale TNT towers in sunny Redfern

The latest in the C&C line comes with a few surprises in store. This ain't the C&C we all know and love ... the world has been re-written. Westwood must have had too much of people talking about cheesy plots, characters and cut-scenes because there's no Tanya, Kane or even Nod in sight.

Instead we have the next generation of US army: commandos sliding down lines into drop zones, secret police rooting out infiltrators and civvies fleeing from market places - all in true 3D. Instead of Nod we have a new terrorist organisation, the Global Liberation Army, strangely enough carrying AK-47s and dressing in a Middle Eastern fashion. In the midst of conflict we have not only the US but also China, the new global superpower. The vehicles are all more realistic than previously including the US's top-secret Aurora jet, F-16s, daisy cutter fuel-bombs, nukes, computer hackers, scuds and angry mobs.

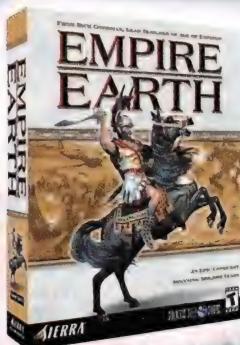
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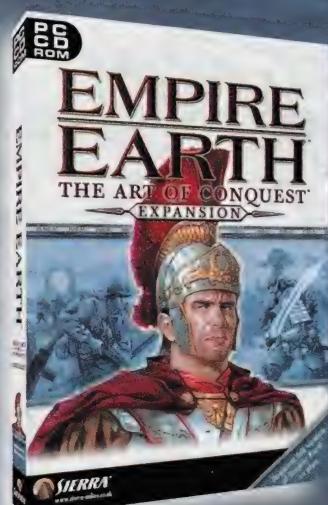
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XP CRACKDOWN

Microsoft have gone on record saying that if you install the XP Service pack your security key will be checked by the patching software. People using pirated software will be notified. MS says that it must act to maintain the rights to its intellectual property. This measure is also just one of many to help increase XP's overall security. The hacker underground has already leapt in to counter MS's efforts.

R.I.P NAPSTER

When a federal judge blocked the sale of Napster's assets to one of its biggest investors it was all over for the music-swapping site that launched a thousand ships. Napster has been in trouble for quite some time, but now the last of its staff has been fired and its gear is being hocked.

Also, file-swapping site Madstar has been hit with a court injunction, with the judge ruling it contributed to copyright infringement "on a massive scale". How far underground will file-swapping be driven?

MOON MONEY

The US government has given approval for the first flight to the moon by a commercial company. After waiting for two years for the green light TransOrbital of California will send a mission up 2003 to take pictures and video of the moon for use in immersive moon simulations amongst other things. It also plans to take photos of the Apollo site to lay rumours of a faked landing to rest. Finally, for a mere \$US2500 a gram, it will take something to the moon for you.

SPAM, NO MA'AM

US consumer groups are lobbying the Federal Trade Commission with regards to spam mail. The group wants companies using misleading subject lines to be prosecuted and to ensure that any spam comes with information on how to be removed from the mailing list. All well and good but that American first amendment thing is coming out again...

Mistmare

For whom the bells toll

RPG plots seem to be getting more interesting of late. Arxel Tribe's Mistmare definitely isn't bucking that trend. It's set in 1996 but a very different 1996. Back in the 1300s the Holy Roman state had developed an awesome power-base as well as instant communication through its magic system of church bells.

Things start to go awry when a mysterious fog sweeps through central Europe destroying the

minds of all those who touch it and releasing hideous monsters. Only barely can the Holy Roman state protect its borders and most of Europe is lost. Fast forward 600 years and players take control of an Inquisition monk in a world of magic and terrible creatures. You have been sent to find a guy who's basically the anti-Christ and you just know you'll end up in the fog searching for answers. (Sounds like being the editor of a major gaming mag - Ed)



He came out of the fog...

Breed

Naughty little Breeders

Earth expands its grip into the stars, stretching resources thin to gobble up more territory. Soon the outer colonies come under attack from ferocious, if a little dim-witted, aliens. After much pleading from the colonies Earth sends out its troops. A huge war is waged and eventually the colonies are safe from the Breed. Only one ship is in any shape to limp back to Earth.

When they arrive they find the outer colony attacks were a diversion and a much tougher, and smarter Breed have taken over the Earth. Resistance is failing and mankind's only hope that the battle-hardened veterans of the USS Darwin are good enough to hook up with the resistance and cause a major upset.

This is the set up for Brat Design's ECTS-award winning game. Keep your eyes peeled this won't be the last you hear of Breed.



Generic? You say this look generic? DIE EVIL SPACE BUG!

Path To War

Development gets Mystic

When a Mi'Jarin Knights' ship is shot down whilst investigating shady goings on, everybody realises that someone has something seriously nasty cooking. Accusations fly and three factions march towards an all-out war built on distrust and misdirection.

It's the player's job to get to

the bottom of things ... in one way or another.

Mi'Jarin Chronicles: The Path to War is the debut title from News South Wales based Mystic Development and will be powered by the Serious Sam engine.

This Aussie start-up isn't shy, offering a game where the player's actions can plunge

worlds into a war between multiple factions, any of which they can choose to side with, and an adaptive world which changes to meet the style of the player.

The game is still in the very early stages and sounds very ambitious, so we'll keep you posted on how Mystic Dev fare.

Fate has chosen you...



ArchAngel

face it in ArchAngel, the mystical action-adventure game for your pc.



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AUSTRALIA'S MOST WANTED

Send your entries to
amw@pcpowerplay.com.au

Okay so is this some kind of joke? Has there been a conspiracy among PCPP readers to make us here at the mag think you've all gone completely insane? I'm talking about Duke Nukem Forever at #10 is what I'm talking about. Don't you people realise that in all probability the game will never ever be released? Take 2 doesn't even bother putting it on its release schedule anymore! Elsewhere in the more sensible parts of the list, the presence of Starcraft 2 at #6 is interesting, indicating that more than a few

people have been playing their Warcraft 3 very diligently and getting all excited about the very early Starcraft 2 trailer included as a bonus for finishing WC3 on Hardest. Finally, in the spirit of this 'going through the list backwards' edition of AMW, we find Age of Mythology taking out top spot - not too much longer to wait now folks! And by the way, we'd be lying if we didn't say seeing Deus Ex 2 above Unreal 2 gives us a sense of smug satisfaction. Keep those entries coming though, the more we get, the more accurate the list becomes!



1	Age of Mythology
2	Doom 3
3	Deus Ex 2
4	Unreal 2
5	C&C Generals
6	Starcraft 2
7	Freelancer
8	NFS Hot Pursuit 2
9	Everquest 2
10	Duke Nukem Forever

Orc me baby one more time winners!

Well what a competition. Back in PCPP#78 we offered up a copy of Warcraft 3 Special Edition and five runners-up copies of the standard game. All you folks had to do was 'Warcraft-ise' your favourite pop song, giving it more of an orcish flavour. And by gum did the entries flow. We received variations on everything from Kylie to Kraftwerk, B52s to Bananarama, proving that even though we as PCPP readers may have the same taste in gaming, we sure as hell have a wide... uh... appreciation of music. While there was no end to unexpected song conversions, the only way for us to determine a clear winner was to take into account not only the song, but the actual social commentary made by the entrant. And that's why Dado Hrustanasic of East Malvern in Victoria is our winner. Consider, if you will, the following masterpiece:

RUSH HIM
To the tune of 'Beat It'
Michael Jackson

I want the special edition of Warcraft 3
'Coz I don't have the game, don't you just pity me?
I'm writing you this song, so I can win it for free
So read it, just read it

Special Edition comes with really cool stuff
But even with it all the fights will still be tough
You really wanna win, it's ok to be rough
So rush him, but you wanna be fair

CHORUS
Just rush him, rush him, rush him,
rush him
No one wants to be defeated
Show him how funky strong is your defence

This ain't no newbie you're playing against
Just rush him

He's out to build, you better do what you can
You wanna be an orc, don't want to be a man
You wanna win the game, so attack while you can
And rush him, just rush him

You have to show him that you're really not scared
You're playing Warcraft 3, this ain't no normal game
He'll map hack you, then beat you, then tell you you're lame
So rush him, but you want to be fair

REPEAT CHORUS UNTIL AUDIENCE'S EARS MELT AND THEY CRACK OPEN EACH OTHER'S SKULLS TO FEAST ON THE GOO INSIDE

Our lucky runners up include David Gaider of Cessnock NSW, whose alteration of the seminal Ice Ice Baby included the line "I haven't done a pee cause getting out of my seat is a felony"; Terence Ng of Greensborough Victoria, who bravely converted Barry Manilow's "I write the songs" to "I Own the Sword" and then added in 16-point bold type a disclaimer insisting that he WASN'T A BARRY MANILOW FAN; Andrew Colta of Perth WA and his impressively long conversion of Meatloaf's Bat Out of Hell; Tim Ardent of Bowral NSW who tackled Shakira's Pepsi commercial (short but sweet) and finally Kate Wilton of St George, QLD who provided a charming but very slightly filthy skewed look at the Corrs' "I Never Loved You Anyway". All in all a great competition, and more than worthy of copies of Warcraft 3 for all!

Grab a hold of your thing!



Before we go any further I'd like to reassure our readership that the staff member responsible for the unreasonably filthy and cheap title gag associated with this competition has been locked in a room with a monstrosity from the pit and forced to read back issues of Next Media's own, now defunct 'Scoop!' magazine which included the greatest competition title ever: "Win a Chainsaw and a Ute to put it in!" - Ed.)

Yeah well anyway, following the frankly astounding surprise that was the Thing (we knew it was going to be good, but we didn't realise it was going to be THAT good) we've insisted that Vivendi gives us 10 copies of the game to give away to those few readers who didn't immediately rush out and buy it on the strength of our review. And in order to sweeten the deal we'll pair each and every one of those 10 copies with a DVD of the film that not only features a Thing but also Kurt Russell!

All you need to do is be a lucky winner of a copy of the Thing (the game) plus a copy of the Thing (the film) is to write a short synopsis of the most unlikely Survival Horror game based on the most inappropriately non-survival horror film. So for instance, we might expect to get Bridges of Madison County survival horror, or Last Tango in Paris survival horror, or even Baraka survival horror. You need to provide a description of the game, a title and also a snappy catchphrase, such as "After two and a half hours of mind-numbing candy floss romantic crap THE TERROR IS ONLY JUST BEGINNING!"

Extra points will be awarded for amusingly photoshopped cover art provided in .bmp or .tif format on CD or 3.5" floppy. And EXTRA bonus points will be further added on if Kurt Russell is somehow incorporated into your synopsis and/or image.

Send your entries to:
Black Skivvy Overdrive
78 Renwick St Redfern NSW 2016

Entries addressed correctly will be opened, so don't worry about cramping all your comedic genius onto the back of a standard envelope. But if you are planning to subscribe this issue, please send your subscription in a separate envelope, to the address provided on the subs page.

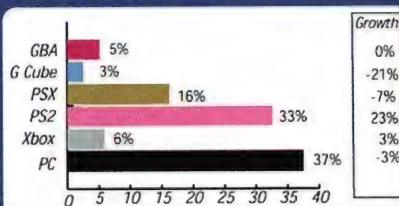
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Over \$30W/E 22 SEPTEMBER
2002 RETAIL SALES

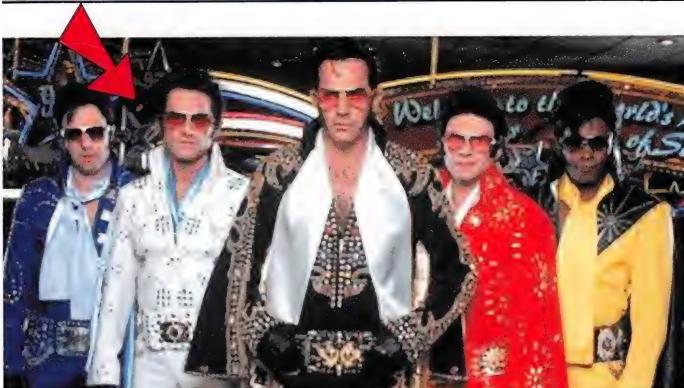
1	◆	Battlefield 1942	Action
2	●	The Sims Deluxe	Strategy
3	●	Icewind Dale 2	RPG
4	▼	Medieval Total War	Strategy
5	◆	Mafia	Action
6	▼	AFL Live 2003	Sports
7	▼	WarCraft 3	Strategy
8	▼	The Sims Vacation	Strategy
9	▼	Neverwinter Nights	RPG
10	▼	The Sims Hot Date	Strategy

TOP
10All Full Priced
GamesW/E 22 SEPTEMBER
2002 RETAIL SALES

1	●	AFL Live 2003	PlayStation 2
2	▼	V8 Supercars	PlayStation 2
3	●	Battlefield 1942	PC/MAC
4	●	Tekken 4	PlayStation 2
5	▲	Stuntman	PlayStation 2
6	▼	Resident Evil	GameCube
7	●	The Sims Deluxe	PC/MAC
8	▼	Medal of Honor: Frontline	PlayStation 2
9	●	Icewind Dale 2	PC/MAC
10	▼	Medieval Total War	PC/MAC

MARKET WATCH
All Games by PlatformJUL 02 W/AUG 02
RETAIL SALES

Kurt Russell's Icewind Dale 2



But why stop at one vaguely Kurt Russell based competition when you can have two? Even AND ESPECIALLY if there's no good reason to include him in a competition where you get to win one of three copies of Icewind Dale 2. To get your hands on this fine RPG, simply name the three very worst Kurt Russell films, and include a short reason for each choice. We here at PCPP think we have a pretty good idea what those three films are, so if your list doesn't match ours you'd better have a damned good

reason for it. Icewind Dale 2, it's the RPG that's not too proud to be associated with Kurt Russell. And it's brought to us thanks to the generous (and by now, slightly nonplussed) folks at Vivendi.

Send your entries to:

Kurt Russell is Irrelevant

78 Renwick St Redfern NSW 2016

Entries addressed correctly will be opened, so don't worry about cramming all your comedic genius onto the back of a standard envelope. But if you are planning to subscribe to this issue, please send your subscription in a separate envelope, to the address provided on the subs page.

COMING SOON

OCTOBER

2002

Sovereign (Ubi Soft)
Metropolis Mania (Ubi Soft)

Sea Dogs 2 (Ubi Soft)
Battle Realms: Winter of the Wolf (Ubi Soft)

IL2 Sturmovik Add-On (Ubi Soft)
Airlines 2 (Take 2)

Airport Tycoon 2 (Take 2)

DX: Vietcong (Take 2)

Iron Storm (Take 2)

NFS Hot Pursuit 2 (EA)

NASCAR Thunder 2003 (EA)

Black Hawk Down (EA)

FIFA 2003 (EA)

Beam Breakers (Red Ant)

Farscape (Red Ant)

Sudden Strike II (Red Ant)

War & Peace (Red Ant)

Warbirds III (Red Ant)

White Fear (Red Ant)

Archangel (Red Ant)

Arx Fatalis (Red Ant)

Post Mortem (Red Ant)

Project Nomads (Red Ant)

Real War - Rogue States (Red Ant)

Empire Earth: Art of Conquest (Vivendi)

No One Lives Forever 2 (Vivendi)

Hoyle Casino Empire (Vivendi)



NOVEMBER

2002

Tiger USA Tour 2003 (EA)

Harry Potter Chamber of Secrets (EA)

Medal of Honor Team Assault (EA)

Sim City 4000 (EA)

Bond 007: Nightfire (EA)

NBA Live 2003 (EA)

Dark Age of Camelot Expansion (Vivendi)

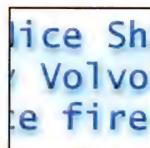
Total Immersion Racing (Vivendi)

The Fellowship of the Ring (Vivendi)

DECEMBER

2002

A conspiracy of elites means there are no reliable realease dates or games expected for December. What a wicked world we live in.



Commercialism Will Eat Itself

There's something wrong when you're watching kids TV after Daria and you have no idea whether the semi-random riot of motion and sound before you is:

- the beginning of a new show,
- a video clip,
- a two-and-a-half minute ad,
- an alien transmission trying to communicate through bright, flashing, colours,
- all of the above.

It turned out to be option (e). It was an ad for the beginning of a show, in the form of a video clip, which would doubtless spin off into a line of toys and, trust me, it was pretty alien.

With virtual money and electronic funds transfers; broadband set to deliver DVD movies, software and music over the 'net; and in-game characters bringing you your real-world e-mail (like the villagers in Black & White), Lara Croft drinking Lucozade and so forth, lines in cyberspace are bound to get blurrier than the morality of a Danzo Direct reality TV show. Let's have a look...

Virtual Ad Nauseam

Ads should be catchy but this is ridiculous. What's distracting me is a giant blimp playing a Nine Inch Nails video clip. It's shedding deafening sound, light and ordering details.

That's all it takes for my foot to step squarely on a Pop-Up Trap. I'm bombarded by images of Diet Lard (97% lard free), All Natural Eyeliner (32 shocking shades to make him take notice), and a subscription to Poodle-Verse (the only dog magazine with ruffles) ... that'll teach me to block demographic cookies.

I finally stagger to the Volvo Safety Car and slide in via the smooth-track(tm) doors. MaXedOut-PeP takes the wheel and we're away.

If the Clan Coke makes it to the MacDonalds we'll never get them. On Saturday mornings the Gold Arches radiate an after-Tee-ball safety field full of fries and happy little fat kids.

We can't let that happen.

I need something special so I dial up v-bay on the car interface. That blimp-promoted Nine Inch Nails track should be perfect for the Dynamic Soundtrack settings. We'll get Cinematic Edge(tm) ... and at a mere \$3.50 a song, it's a heck of a bargain.

Commercial Brakes

With Trent's screams filling the car we hit the Coke car hard and on a nice angle. They've gone for the Jaguar X12 Limited Edition and I watch happily as it flies off the road.

Who puts generic tyres on a thing like that? Bridgestone, Firestone, Goodyear, Olympic tyres all offer up to 47% greater stability and road holding...

I make a mental note to check the tyres on my car offline - please don't let them be a generic brand.

As we swing around, one of the Coke boys has rolled out of the car and is calmly standing in our path, gun drawn. Is that "Hey Man Nice Shot" I hear playing?

His bullet blasts into our radiator and the Volvo skids to a stop with the popping sound of seven airbags inflating. With such a Hollywood-powered shot any other car would have gone up like a firecracker but not our Volvo Safety Concept Car. Above our car an explanatory tab rotates showing in neon letters: "Hollywood-style explosion aborted by 27 patented Volvo safety features. Have a nice fire fight. :)"

Product Shots

I draw my handgun and notice that it feels funny as I fire it. What had been a classic Colt .45 when I holstered it was now a brand new Heckler and Koch 9mm. Our clan must have signed another corporate sponsorship deal. I check my tag and we're now HK_Clan_Pepsi. Sneaky bastards!

MaXedOut-PeP's shiny new HK clears the last of the resistance.

As the smoke effects clear I notice one of the fallen girls is wearing an amazingly eye-catching long jacket. In an instant it's added to my shopping basket. Phew, I'd almost forgotten my girl's birthday.

There's no time to dwell because up ahead MacDonalds looms. We have to get out of here fast ... Macca's and Clan Pepsi are not on speaking terms, no sir!

Giant clowns with red afros come bounding towards us all hopped up on Coke syrup. If they catch us it'll be Mac-time and we'll suffer a severe Mac-attack.

"It takes two hands to handle a Whopper," I yell while ducking down an alleyway - it's textbook stuff. White-gloved hands flap around us like demented pigeons but we're home free.

As we stand panting, white letters appear in two neat lines in the lower edge of my vision: "Nine Inch Nails Vs. Filter ... Love of the Machine".

The world swims and disappears and is replaced by the hectic colours of E3 and the drabness of a grey-suited marketing graduate.

"Wow, that was awesome. The 3D graphics, the surround sound, the physics ... it made me forget I was on a showroom."

"Thank you, sir," says the suit-guy.

"Just one question: was that a demo for the game, a NIN video clip or an ad for Matrix-style apparel?"

"It's a complete experience, Sir," he says like a good marketing graduate.

"Well, I can say with full confidence that, were I a credit card, I would have been pushed to my physical and mental limits."

Double Cross Marketing

Back to reality now, and I'm watching Austin Powers beat up Britney Spears over disguised diet cola in a TV ad for something. Are they selling the new Mike Myers film, soft drink or violent punishment for crimes against music?

I'm still a little confused, but I know someone has too much money in their advertising budget.

Developers will eventually be tempted to use this and I say let 'em.

Let's say you want a cool cityscape, and you want to make a statement about cola advertising excess, why not have a series of central buildings shaped like letters spelling a corporate name? Then, you hit up Coke or Pepsi for cash. If they pay, it becomes funny on a number of levels as well as giving you a striking skyline and them product placement.

In our "pop will eat itself" world you can get away with amazing things. Let's just hope that when the inevitable commercialisation comes it leaves the grey suit at home and comes out with imaginative style, flare, and all puns blazing.



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A Greek Tragedy



Last month the Greek government took action against one of the most serious dangers to face human civilisation since the invention of the fourteen-speed kitchen whiz, and in doing so did more for the culture of gaming than anyone since Jeff Minter's flying Llamas.

Unless you've been tin mining in Alaska for the last six weeks you probably already know about Greece's new law against electronic gaming. Games sites have been bleating about it ever since "Shock horror, Greece bans Mario" etc. But what is it really all about?

Greek Law Number 3037 was supposed to be about preventing internet gambling. But as Greece's legislators were all rather concerned about missing out on happy hour at their local they didn't spend much time fine tuning it and ended up with a blanket ban on all electronic gaming. This means everything from Nokia mobile phones to Game Boys, card machines to solitaire.

I fell on my swoop

In one fell swoop everything concerning the electronic games industry became illegal. Employees of games distributors suddenly found themselves in the same legal category as Ned Kelly and Charley Manson, any school kid with a Game Boy was instantly transformed into a pint sized Al Capone and every old person's home with an electronic bingo caller became a house of ill repute.

Greek police will be responsible for catching offenders, who will face fines of 5,000 to 75,000 Euros and imprisonment of one to 12 months (unless they can find the secret key and get out through the long forgotten sewer complex and past the mutated post-experimental lab technicians). A special task force, wearing bright blue overalls and puffy oversised shoes, has been created to police the new laws and generate positive publicity by making school appearances and charity presentations.

Well pardon the Guerrilla for being a wet blanket but what's wrong with making gaming dangerous, for real? I think Greek gamers have got something over all of us now. Even a dull

game might seem like the biggest thrill of your life if you knew that any minute the feds could come bursting through the front door screaming "Freeze!! Drop the mouse! I SAID DROP THE MOUSE, NOW!!! How cool.

Maybe the Greek government will start a 'War on Games' like the US' 'War on Drugs'. Greek Special Forces could be used to assassinate key members of the game development community, like Peter Molyneux. What about David Perry? I never did like him. Game developers could be encouraged to involve themselves in other, less illegal activities like growing Soya beans, for example.

Beware Greeks bearing teeth

Perhaps the Greeks will even begin initiating extradition proceedings against those found guilty of gaming for evil. You could be chatting to a seemingly friendly and very inquisitive player within a town in Everquest and the next thing you know the SWAT boys are driving a tank through your living room and you're on a boat to Athens.

Perhaps things will get REALLY interesting in Greece and we'll see a return to the 30's prohibition era with game runners bringing the latest releases over the border and illegal 'speakeasy' LAN cafes hiding above old Laundromats. Dirty cops on the take, Judges popping down for a quick 'frag' every night. Why is this good? Because it brings glamour to gaming, and glamour means babes, serious babes, and serious cool. Hmm, maybe those Greeks aren't so silly after all.

One handed Olympics?

Of course on the other hand it could also just be a ploy in favour of the Greek Olympic effort. Get the kiddies away from their games and what have they got? Sport! Greece will be the hosts of the next Olympics and after the all conquering efforts of the Sydney Olympic Committee they are probably feeling the pressure. If the game laws are followed up by a series of announcements concerning health, fitness and the obligation of every Greek under 30 to swim a hundred miles carrying a

pregnant Donkey before work everyday then I think we'll know where the government is coming from.

On the other side of the coin we have an industry that is now illegal; their reaction could be as entertaining as the Greek government's. It is certainly not unheard of for a US administration to interfere in the sovereignty of other nations when her business interests are at stake. So how might the US government intervene on say, Microsoft's behalf? (On Microsoft's behalf!? Have we forgotten that the US government has had ol' Billy Gates in and out of court for the last 5 years? -dep ed).

A covert operation to overthrow the Greek government might be on the cards. Perhaps some faked documents proving that the Greek Prime Minister is secretly a hardcore counter strike player will provide the necessary pretext. Perhaps Microsoft will itself launch a full scale invasion to liberate its' employees and Greek gamers right to play Monster Truck Madness without fear of reprisal.

Greek sausage!

I can see Microsoft's hardware division feverishly planning the operation already "and here we have our new combination force feedback joystick and assault rifle, fully USB compatible and available in black or cream. Remember, the changing of a magazine by any non-authorised Microsoft personnel will result in the cancellation of your warranty" (and or require a friggin activation code with each reload -dep ed).

The bottom line is this: anything illegal is inherently more fun, so stop complaining about the Greeks and start encouraging our own government to make games illegal. Ban them now!

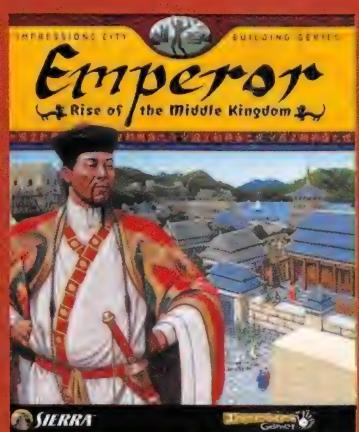
The Guerrilla Gamer learnt the hard way that life is terribly unfair, and that the street, far from being the romanticised arena of true poetry is nothing more than a long strip of asphalt that people drag your face along at all hours of the night. Plus there are far too many stray dogs about these days. What was I talking about? Oh yes, take anything this nut says with a grain of salt, we sure as hell don't endorse him.

What's the best tools to
build China these days?



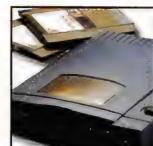
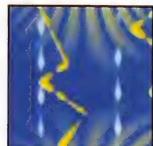
A - A well-oiled mouse
with two buttons?"

B - A Ming Dynasty
toothpick?"



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import
use eac
portunit



Backing Up - Even Gamers Must



How many of us backup properly?

"Get outta here!" you say; "this is a gaming mag..." and I'll forgive you if flip straight to the reviews but you need to come back and finish this because I've lost too much stuff myself to let you off the hook. EVERY month I get one clicking-disk RAID question, one "help my drive is dead" question and one "I can't find my files" question - that's EVERY month fans and how many can't mail me because their one and only drive is #DEADBEEF#? I also get one email a month about a stolen box...

Jam it in my disk drive

An effective backup can be made in several ways but it's generally not easy, simple or foolproof. An unattended, overnight, complete, backup image of the drive, bit for bit, onto a spare network drive is possibly the best method barring a calamitous power surge to all PCs on the site. If this backup image drive were removable and placed in say an off-site, Class A safe, then we'd be humming. I can image my drives and I do backup this way monthly across the 100 Mb/s home network onto a dedicated storage PC. Critical files, like this column, are saved onto a removable drive, a floppy and uploaded to my web site. I can't do this with whole hard drives. The idea of uploading my drive images onto a web host, using a dial-up system, is just not viable right now; with an 18 GB image this would be no fun at all. Until home broadband/cable design becomes more accessible, much faster and much cheaper, to make off-site backups feasible, then we're all stuck with an image on a second drive or spanned CDs and working backwards towards saving our word and spreadsheet files onto a floppy diskette (ugh!). I expect that fast Internet access and availability of enormous but cheap storage space will converge in the next few years. Backup problems will only be a matter of *PEBKAC rather than limited access to backup hardware and supporting software. But I still blame everyone in the IT industry from software authors to hardware manufacturers for problems.

Compressed security?

Like most people, I can afford one good application, but not several, to do something with one that the other cannot, like backup to CD-R/RW because hard drives are still not perfect. With DVD R/RW hardware costs still a little up in the clouds I need to look at CD-R Media Spanning for large backup needs. My critical data files are small enough for Image AND File level backup onto CD-R/RW media but I do need On-The-Fly Compression to get a one-disc jobby when wanted. To also help with size issues I want Incremental and Differential file support and I also want a Scheduler for unattended backup. Whether I backup to removable media or a disk I want Password Protection for added security, an Intuitive 1-2-step Interface and be able to backup over my (simple home) network. I already game over the network why shouldn't I be able to backup over it? Hand in hand with all that I need to be able to restore a file, folder, or complete partition using the Intuitive 1-2-3 step Interface. I'd also look for the ability to build a bootable Emergency/Recovery CD as well. I also require USB 2.0 and FireWire support. Good backup programs are not widely advertised but they are available; you have to do the work of finding one that suits you and you have to do it now. Everything in the home is converging and it's evident now as Palm Pilots, fridges, washing machines, portables, telephony et al, rely on a PC in the home or office.

Once damage is done to files on your computer (no matter what the cause) it's often too late. Common causes of data loss are virus/worm/trojan attacks; tinkering by well-meaning pseudo-techy friends/relatives; power surges; hardware or software glitches; theft; accidental file deletion (this includes FDISK for the uninitiated); a partitioning program going rogue and damage through mishandling. Do you have a single disk that you can afford not to regularly backup? It's rare to find any PC that does not have some type of important data stored on it (why would you store it if you at least

didn't feel it was important at the time?).

Important data includes word processing documents (assignments, Wills, job applications, Resumes), spreadsheets (cost analysis, budgets) and databases (sporting club registration lists); save-game files, MP3 songs and playlists, official game and application patches; registration information and CD-Keys for software, email address books and important email. All original software CDs (and diskettes) should immediately be copied and stored in two secure, separate locations after installation.

Don't miss the boat

Determine a schedule for full backups by considering how frequently your data changes. It is an excellent idea to have three full sets of backup tapes, data cartridges or CDs and to store one set at another location to protect against fire, theft, or some other disaster. If your data is critical, you may wish to have a separate cycle of backups (e.g., quarterly or yearly) that can be used to recover when someone damages (or deletes) a vital file, but the deletion isn't discovered until months later. The full backups should be coordinated with periodic incremental backups. The incremental backup, which copies just the files that have changed, normally runs very quickly and takes just a minute or so. Many people find that an incremental backup run at the end of each day works quite well. This way their data is protected should anything happen overnight. One rule of thumb for incremental backups is to do them when it would become difficult or not cost effective to re-enter the data.

Be certain you store the recovery program for your backups with your backups. Some people have regularly backed up their data only to find the only version of the recovery program was on their hard drive and not available to actually run...that'd be as funny as a flogging with a frill neck lizard.

*PEBKAC: Problem Exists Between Keyboard and Chair

Rule one:

Never be seen

Rule two:

Never underestimate
your enemies

Rule three:

Never show
you're frightened

K.HAWK
SURVIVAL INSTINCT

Feel Paranoid

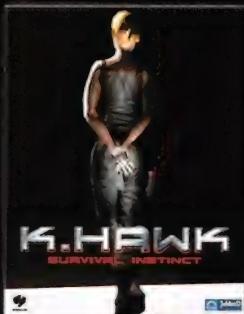
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Which is why we've hit up Seagate for five of the phattest IDE hard drives currently available, the Barracuda ATA V. Running at 7200rpm, the Barracuda is fast, reliable and helps alleviate n00b frustrations by loading your levels just that tiny crucial little bit faster than other drives. And did we mention we had five of them to give away, each one worth \$400?

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PCPP#77

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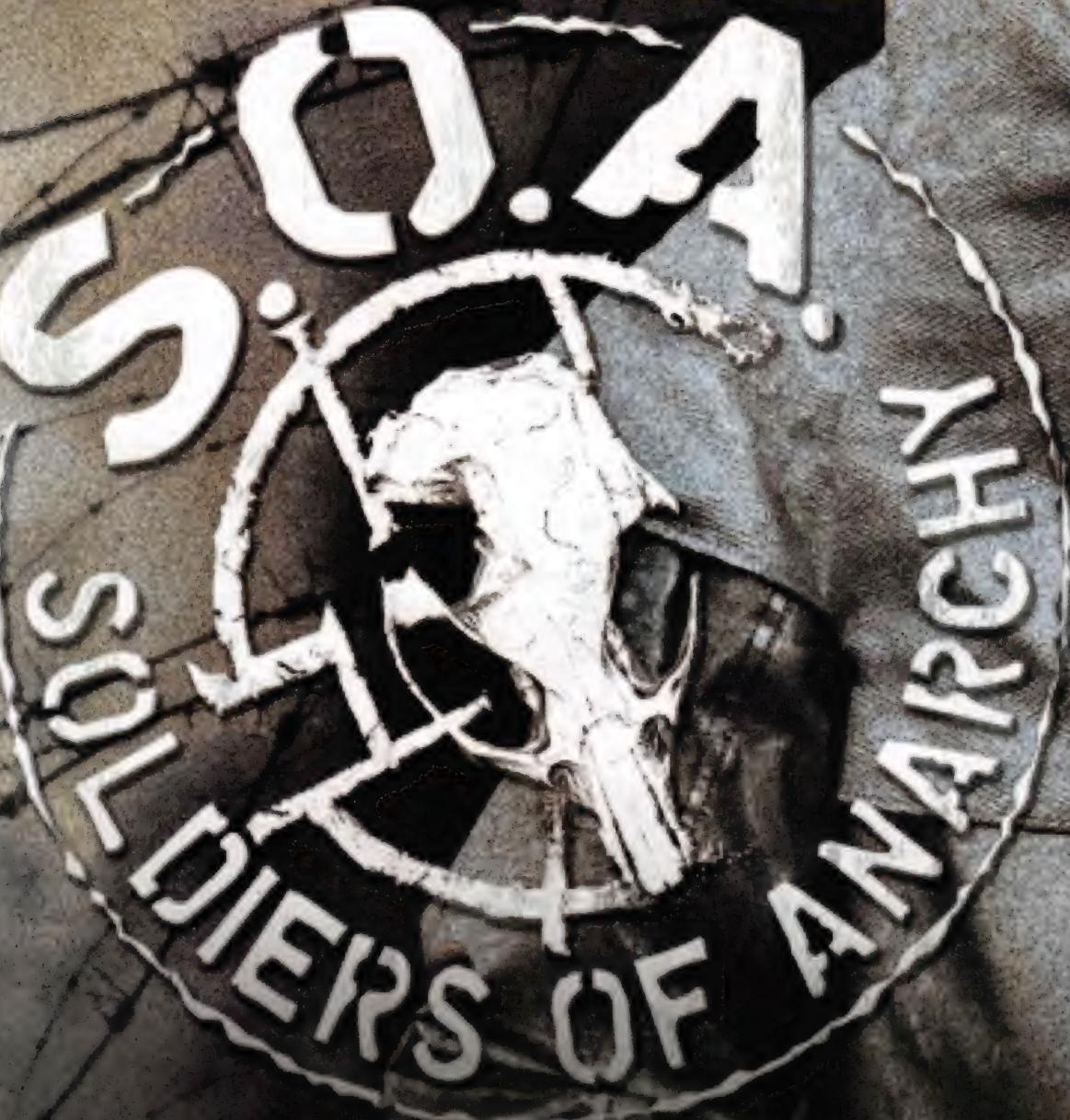
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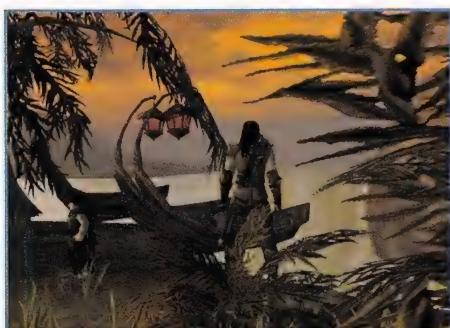


INPREVIEW

They give us the code, we give you the lowdown



- 034 Unreal 2
- 040 NOLF 2
- 044 Lord of the Rings
- 046 Blood Rayne
- 048 Chamber of Secrets
- 049 Empire Earth Expansion
- 050 Casino Empire
- 052 Sim City 4 Update



We're swiftly approaching that time of the year again, when publishers release all the games they've been saving up for the Christmas rush, bombarding us with dozens of quality games to choose from, despite the fact that we only have enough money for two or three. It's just further evidence of how the way we live the hobby is basically incompatible with the way companies like to sell products. See, as near as I can figure it out, if each distributor released one high-quality title per month, then we would buy it, giving us somewhere between 12 and 60 great games to enjoy through the year. But they just don't space it out, do they? They save stuff up, they force developers to rush stuff out, just to make 'Christmas'.

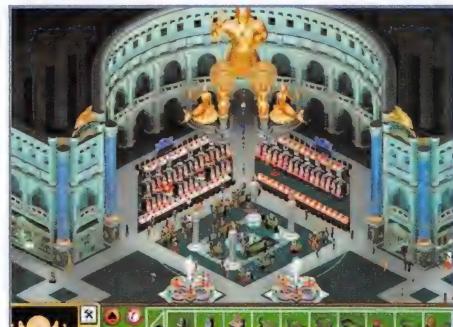
But the true irony of the whole situation is that over the Christmas period we have LESS TIME in which to enjoy games. We have extra demands placed on us, by family, by girlfriends, boyfriends, office car pools and the whole rest of it. We need to spend our energy stressing about fitting too much crap into an unreliable vehicle and then somehow make it all the way to Coffs Harbour without slamming it front-on into an oncoming petrol tanker at 110kph. And our risk of violent death is

FURTHER INCREASED by the fact they we're sitting there trying to decide whether to get Unreal Tournament 2003, NOLF 2 or Blood Rayne, because even though we'd like all three of those games, we know because of this whole Coffs Harbour trip thing we can only afford one of them.

Anyhow, this month's previews section, the last before our special Christmas edition offers up a few big titles, starting with Unreal 2. It's curious, because while Unreal has always received a lot of coverage in PCPP, that has never translated to amazingly spectacular sales. It's almost as if, despite what we tell you, you people just don't get excited about Unreal. Well, GET EXCITED ABOUT UNREAL 2! It's truly impressive. Read the preview, and we challenge you to stay un-excited. Why not write to letters@pcpowerplay.com.au describing your exciting new feelings about Unreal 2?

Still, this month there's also more details on NOLF 2, a taste of Lord of the Rings and an update on the state of Sim City 4. Enjoy.

Justin Hoffman
letters@pcpowerplay.com.au





THE AWAKENING

It was almost vapourware, but when Unreal was released 22nd May 1998 (Thanks Jere - Ed) it took the singleplayer FPS experience to a new level with more monsters, bigger environments and graphical effects like nothing we'd ever seen. Now the sequel is set to raise the bar again. **Timothy C. Best** takes a detailed look at the future of singleplayer gaming.

Ever had one of those days? One minute you're getting Mrs. Johansson's cyber cat out of the space tree and handing out traffic infringements ... in short, nothing that's going to get the producers of *Cops* banging down your door for a ride-a-long. The next minute, you're caught in the middle of a brutal war between six factions of death-dealing no-goodniks who have found ancient artefacts in your quietly remote corner of the universe.

In times like this, there's only one thing to do: find solace in the arms of high calibre weaponry.

Legend probably wouldn't be all that impressed with my version of its back-story, but there really isn't much more to it, and when you are talking a straight-up first-person shooter you don't need much more than a setting. Legend would probably be even less happy with me calling it a "straight-up first person shooter", but looking through all the glitz and glamour, that's what lies at the heart of *Unreal II*.

So, why all the excitement? That's simple: the glitz and glamour, of course.

The Awakening takes a pure style of game goes to town on the details and then makes it all look unreal too.



THE AWAKENING

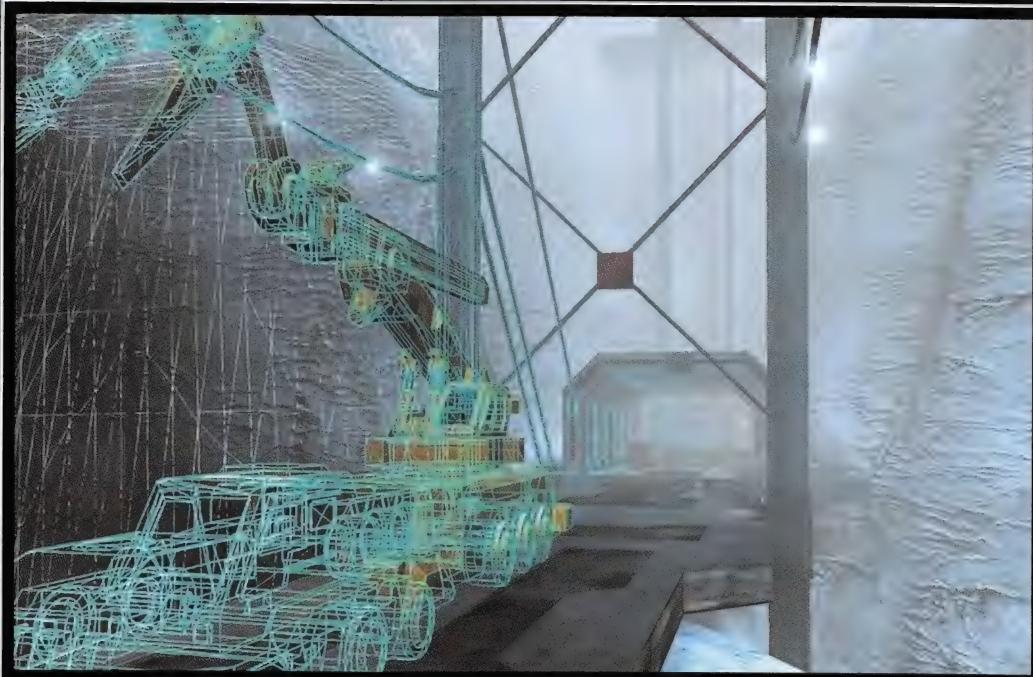
The Glitz

The rocket launcher is heavy in your hands, and the recoil rocks you as you fire off two rockets in quick succession. You watch the smoke trail from the first rocket swirl around the second as it blasts along in its wake. You've never seen war quite like this.

Unreal II is set for high-end GeForce 3 or better cards and has been optimised for characters to have around 10 times the polygon count of the original game and the environments to have 100 times as many. What that means is a serious jump in the level of the detail of everything in the game. Foes will have upwards of 3000 polygons apiece, and key characters, like your crew, will be looking at more than 5000. These poly counts produce the remarkable detail that you can see in the screenshots peppered around the page.

Something that you can't truly appreciate looking at screenies is the particle system that breathes life into Unreal II. The movement of hair, open flames, swirling smoke, jetting steam, shattering glass, bouncing sparks, drifting snow, running water, falling rain, wafting mist and so on all are governed by this system. Legend has lost its frick'n mind, here.

There are 19 particle types (sprites, streaks, points, triangles and so on) with 41 forces that can act on them, including movement, acceleration, gravity, friction, rotation, collision and damage. What this means is that not only will flying shell casings disturb smoke,



but you will see them rotate in the air, bounce off the ground, each other, and react to your motion as you whip around. Rain will even bounce off them as they fall.

The system is totally modular so you can pick the elements you wish to affect by which forces, this way you can get the most visual bang for your buck without needing a supercomputer to keep track of every splash of falling rain.

All of this is in addition to per-polygon collision for characters meaning that hands won't go halfway through tables or weapons, and accuracy will be calculated

down to the last millimetre. All in all, it goes to creating a world that is more than just pretty, but a world where the details slowly gang up on you until you can feel the snow sliding off the breaking glass.

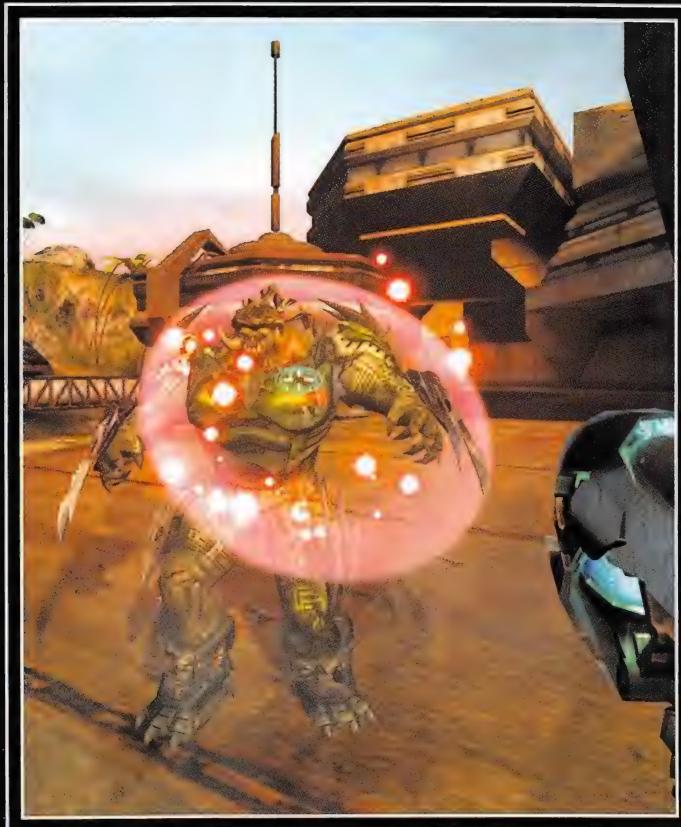
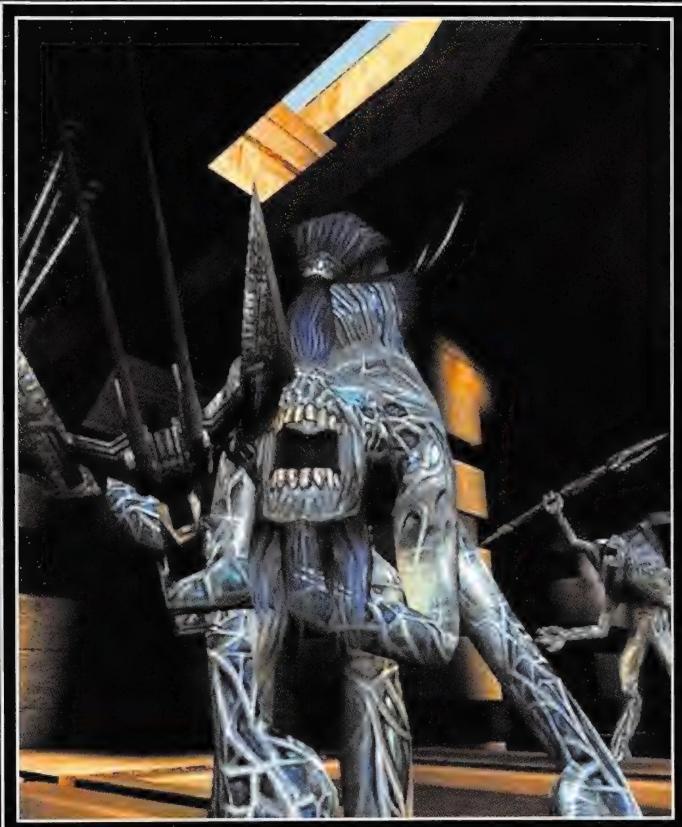
Glamour

Without something interesting happening the most beautifully rendered world is little more than a sexy looking desktop. Legend has pulled out all of the particle-soaked, high-poly stops to try and give players an experience they can lose themselves in.

Many of these missions will be

set in hot zones, where the action surrounding the character is only a small part of the bigger picture. The world will be alive with enemy activity (and weapons fire) with various factions vying for power and skirmishes raging all-around our hero. In the middle of all this our marshal will have to achieve his mission objectives while trying to keep his charges out of trouble. He's also got the overarching goal of finding out what's going on while following orders and getting caught in the crush of as few all-out wars as possible.

Although Unreal II is a through





and through shooter, the player is less a god of destruction and more a guy trying to get a job done in a hostile world.

Players don't just get dropped into the action with a screen of text explaining what is going on, instead all the briefings blend into the world. Most of the story will unfold between missions when you return to your ship the Atlantis and talk to your crew. A nice touch because, really, how much information can you pick up and analyse while in the trenches?

That's what your intelligence officer, Aida is for. She'll brief you

on what's going down and what needs to be done. She'll also look devastatingly exotic and beautiful.

The dialogue system in Unreal II is dynamic and in real-time so when Aida is talking to you you'll see her expressions change as she reacts to your chosen responses and, furthermore, she'll get annoyed if you take too long to answer because she'll take that as you ignoring her. Lip-synch will have Aida speaking the words and her head will even follow you as you pace around whilst she talks to you.

Expanded Multiplayer

Legend is concentrating on the single player experience but that doesn't mean a tacked on multiplayer mode. In fact the expanded multiplayer mode seems to combine standard FPS elements with RTS multiplayer gameplay and options.

It pits groups of players against each other in a battle to control the planet surface and the alien artefacts to be found there.

You start by choosing one of three classes representing the main crew characters you find in Unreal II. You have the grunt (the main character), the spook (your intelligence officer) and the tech (your engineer). The grunt gets the best weapons and is the fighting backbone of your forces.

The spook is the stealth unit and sniper. He or she can even disguise themselves as members of opposing force to spread panic and disorder.

If the scope of the Extended Multiplayer game can be seen anywhere it's in the tech. This character has a massive support and control role. He or she controls the replicators to churn out weapons and ammo to keep the others supplied and as you get further into the game, techs will be able to research and build more and more complex structures like defence turrets, medical centres, force fields, camera pods, mines, recon and repair bots and sensor arrays.

This could be very cool, or very frustrating ...

Misfits

Even your little ship needs a crew and you've got a beauty. They've grabbed all the misfits and loose cannons in the justice system and sent them to a quiet part of the galaxy to be out of the way. Here's your team:



Aida

This is your intelligence operative. You'd be happy to have such an amazing operative working with you except she's way too good to be posted out in the middle of now-where. She's beautiful and exotic and has some horribly dark - the reason why she is an exile.

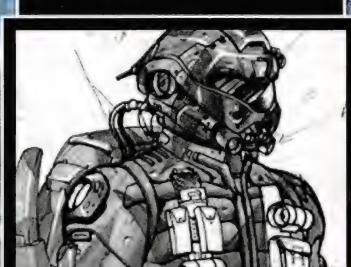
Class: Spook



Issak

Your engineer. He's not a real people person but he's a seasoned campaigner. He fixes the ship and researches the alien weapons you find and then adapts them for human use. (Also bears more than a passing resemblance to Gary Sinise -Not Boy).

Class: Tech

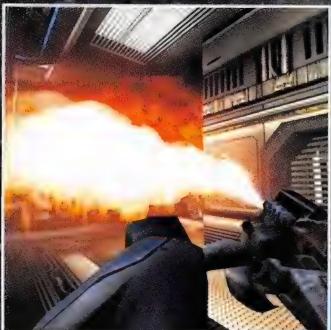
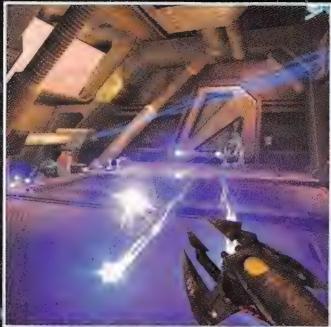


Ne'Ban

Wisecracking, alien pilot. Colourful, loud and outgoing ... also a little nasty on the habits side.

Class: Comic relief

THE AWAKENING



Ordinance

Unreal II comes with 17 weapons including the staples of assault rifle, shotgun, rocket launcher, sniper rifle and laser.

We also have a Multi-mode Grenade Launcher. Incendiary, fragmentation, poison gas, smoke, EMP or stasis grenades can all be set to explode on impact or set to a timer. Talk about alternate fire modes!

The most impressive looking weapon would have to be the flamethrower. Check out the picks. This thing has some impressive range and is great for crowd control.

New weapons also include the Leech Gun which fires, well, leeches which drain life, speed or energy and the Takkra which fires dozens of little hunter seeker drones. All of the weapons have new and improved alternate fire modes such as shrapnel bullets for the assault rifle which shatters and bounces shrapnel around corners and the rocket which splits into four homing mini-missiles. Outstanding.

As you complete missions just how dire the situation is will unfold with the analysis of the information you find and as your engineer researches the alien technology you recover.

Legend is taking special care to build additional story elements into little side-quests (mainly on the Atlantis) so that players who really want to dive into the tale can really swim around in it, while players who just want to get on with the action need only dip their toes.

High Calibre Solace

The toe dippers will want to know about the action and they shouldn't be disappointed. Players will rock across seven planets, 13 missions, and 25 levels. They will visit eerie alien ruins, the lush flora and fauna of a jungle world, bizarre alien spaceships, stark volcanic plains, go aquatic as well as delve a warren of elaborately carved tunnels.

Our frontier Sheriff will be seeking and destroying, rescuing hostages, infiltrating bases, escorting civilians, assaulting bases (above and below the sea) and raiding enemy spaceships. One base defence mission not only sees you scurry from one stationary turret to the next to

hold off a huge attacking force but has you co-ordinating a group of defenders, with the quality of your orders determining how the defence manages.

From what we've seen, the Serious Sam wave-after-wave-of-enemies levels should make even trigger-happy gamers happy enough to play through some of the more cerebral zones.

Enemy creatures and weapons have also been balanced so that some mobs just beg for room-clearing high-explosives or a frenzy of bullets while other, tougher creatures require a more precise approach that add tension and reduce mad point and clicking.

While progression of the missions is linear, each tactical situation can be approached in a variety of ways. In one mission, for example, you can do your Charles Bronson "Death Wish" impersonation or you can try something a little more diplomatic. Maybe the Skaarj clan could be enticed to join you for a raid on their rivals. At least you wouldn't have to shoot everything that moves that way...

Death Dealing No-Goodniks

Bad guys aren't just cannon fodder

either, in Unreal II they are a colourful part of the world and a draw card in their own right.

While many of the gameplay elements seem quite standard the rogue's gallery is anything but. The most familiar faction in the game is likely to be the Mercs. They are human troops in power armour and toting big guns. The rest of the aliens are a strange lot straight out of over-imaginative and over-caffinated minds.

The two most interesting factions would have to be the flaky N and Striders. The N exist outside our space and time of which there are only three N (hence three types of different N opponent) but since they live outside of time they can touch our time and space in hundreds or thousands of places at once and hence appear to be an army.

You can't kill the N; only disrupt that particular kink in time-space.

The Striders are a group-mind creature, like a cross between coral and Lego. Alone they are little, stupid, marginally bitey, lumps of goo. As they come together they get exponentially smarter and more dangerous as they form community beings like the Strider Villain and then the massive Strider Nemesis. What's cool about the Striders is

People Power

When it was reported that the wildly popular ASMD shock rifle and Flack Cannon had been removed from Unreal, fanboys went nuts.

The team had decided that since they'd had some other cool ideas for weapons that did roughly the same thing, that they'd pass on the two older weapons. Die-hard fans of the weapons just thought they were being dumb and made sensible statements like, "if there's no ASMD rifle, I'm not getting the game." Legend realised that lots of people had made these their signature weapons and have since re-introduced them to the game (at least for multiplayer). Chalk one up for being loud and obnoxious.

that they can disassemble to get past barriers and or though small openings so you never know where you'll find a Strider Nemesis.

The most exciting thing about this weird collection of moving violations is that no two races think the same or will require the same tactics to fight. The Mercs will send heavy armour forward while flanking you with their fast troops, with military precision; the Izarians will mob you from hiding; the Shians will hit you with every fishy on their planet (which they can mind control) and making Striders disassemble so you can take them bit at a time sounds like an art worth your learning. With 24 enemy creatures and six warring factions using a variety of troops in oddball combined-force tactics, you can expect tussles that are out of this world.

Friendly Fire

It was announced in January that Unreal II was going to be solely single-player, so as not to step on the toes of Unreal Tournament 2003.

Well, Legend has come out on the side of "screw that" and Unreal II is coming packed with multiplayer options. Other than the central campaign, players can also

take on a tournament of their own, clawing their way up through three tournament ladders of multiplayer levels populated by bots. All of these levels are also available for multiplayer games on the 'net.

Beyond that all the standard FPS multiplayer modes are on offer including Deathmatch, Capture the Flag and Last Man Standing.

Where things get interesting is the Expanded Multiplayer game. It deserves a special coloured box all of its own ... so check out the "Expanded Multiplayer" boxout.

Looking Unreal

Epic came out and did a stellar job in 1998 amongst a sea of FPS-clone-producing id wannabees. Unreal quickly made a name for itself and was only really given what for by Half-Life when it came out.

Now Legend has taken over the licence while Epic finished its Unreal Warfare engine and Unreal Tournament 2003. It's obvious that Legend have really gone to town to make a game now that raises as many eyebrows now, as the original did four years back.

It's learnt from Half-Life and is trying to sink colour, character and story into the single-player missions to combine with the Unreal graphics and Legendary physics and particle effects. There is little doubt that Unreal II is an amazing

looking game, nor is there any doubt that Legend is lavishing time and imagination on the cannon fodder.

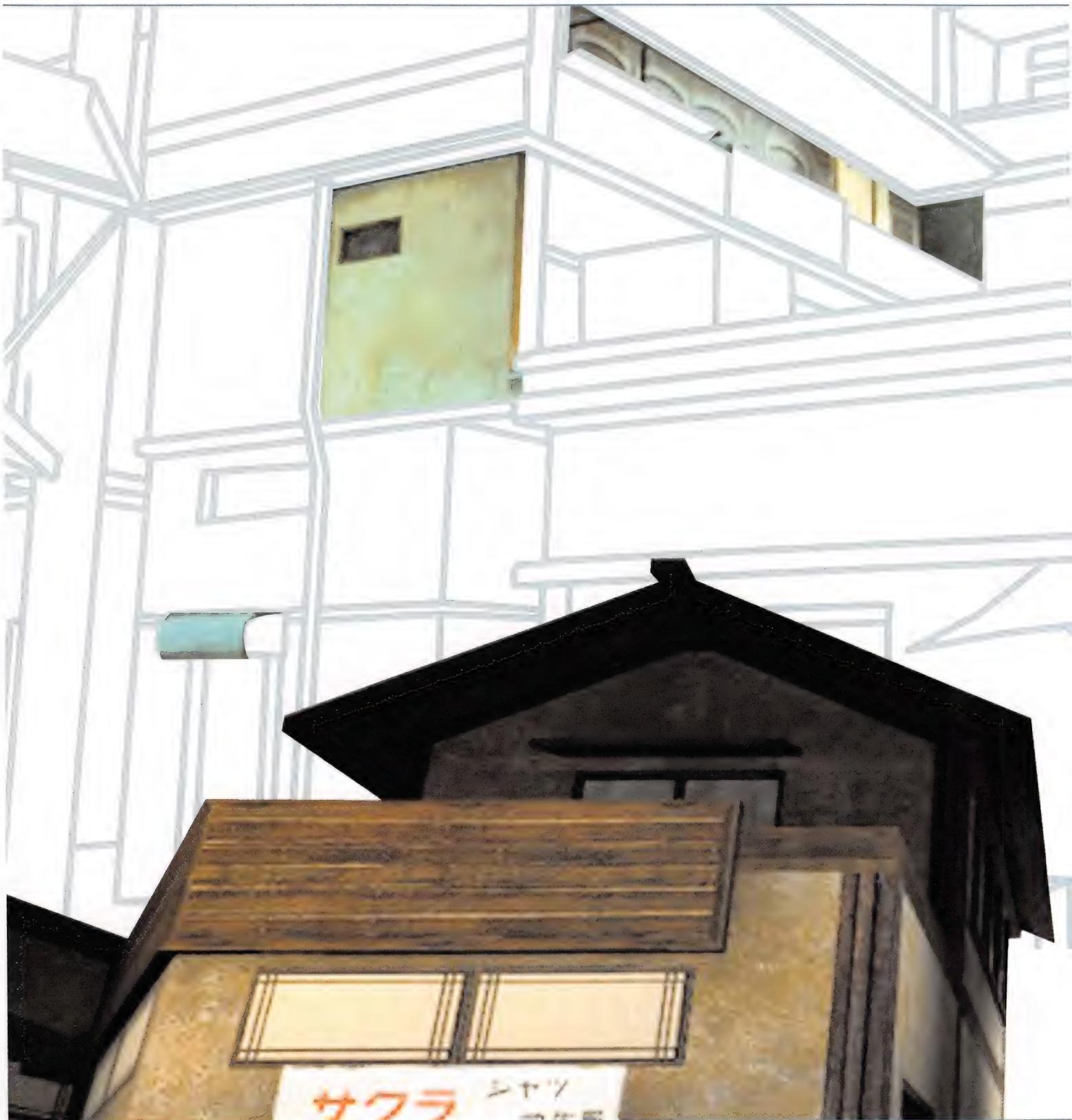
Now all we have to see is what tale they manage to infuse into the action and just how much life they can breath into this alien-infested warzone with a lawman caught in the middle. Finally, the big question mark is how interesting they can make wandering around your ship, talking to crewmembers. Legend insist that its there to immerse you in the world but maybe a briefing and research screen would be a more direct way into the action than characters ambling around your base, giving you lip.

On the other hand, maybe they'll be just what you need to feel like you're actually in a world. Maybe they'll provide just the hook and emotional connection to elevate the missions from being just another bug hunt to a real experience. We'll have to see.



No One Lives Forever 2: A Spy in HARM's Way

Developer: Fox Interactive **Publisher:** Vivendi Universal **Distributor:** Vivendi Universal **Available:** Christmas 2002



At the recent Vivendi Games Fair in London, an imposing woman in a pink plastic, skin-tight outfit is leaning over my shoulder as I try to avoid being mashed by a dozen ninja women in a special preview build of No-One Lives Forever 2 (NoLF 2). The mouse settings are not to my liking, so I'm taking a beating (Sure... - Ed)

"You're Hurting Me", she says coldly in an appropriate London accent. "Look, I Died." I say nothing and apologetically step away from the keyboard. For those who loved the irreverent humour and consummate commitment to serious action that was No-One Lives Forever, the sequel slides us again into the tight fitting pants of the groovy, undercover British UNITY agent, superspy Cate Archer. This time she's a little older, a little wiser and the target of diabolical terror network H.A.R.M.'s assassination designs. Regardless she still lives for the kill. By contrast, the stunning Cate Archer doppelganger glaring at me, seems to be getting off on intimidating the games journos, so I wander off to find someone with information.



No-One Lives Forever 2 uses a heavily modified version of the LithTech engine. The NoLF 2 Team was set to use LithTech 3.0 but the feature sets of weren't ready in time to begin work. So the game team themselves had to implement those changes and once that was done, they added their own and things just snowballed. The Jupiter Engine features projected texture shadows, nasty explosions due to many thousands of particles as well as naturally flowing water and animated vegetation. NoLF 2 will be the first game to appear on the Jupiter Engine but it has been licensed to other developers. No word yet on which other games will use it at this stage.





Land of the Rising Gun

The man I find is Chris Miller, Producer at Fox Interactive on No-One Lives Forever 2. We're looking at a scene in rural Japan and it's nothing short of stunning. For now, it is calm. Sunlight through the canopy of trees overhead, abrupt hills rise up in the near distance, a dirt path in the forest leads us to a village. There's a high level of detail evident in the fences by the side of the road which is bordered by a swift moving river to the left, with glistening ripples flying across its surface. All the levels demonstrated run SMOOTH with nice, sharp textures and realistic animations.

The first point Miller makes is that: "The detail level in NoLF has gone up exponentially. There's 30 times the polygon count from the first game so we're really proud of how the game world looks. Here we have fully reflective surfaces like water, leaves fall from the trees, the trees themselves are moving and blades of grass sway in the breeze."

Cate Archer is sent to Japan at the opening of the game to investigate some untoward ninjas, only to find she is their target! As she approaches the village, notable for its high pitched curved roofs, ornamental sculptures and tatami mats. The soundtrack is all plucked kotos and end-

blown flutes that inspire thoughts of a Warlord Japan that only exists in the cinema.

"In the first game, training was off-site," Miller continues, "You were taken out and trained. This time we wanted to incorporate the training into the levels. Here we have a mechanical myna bird controlled by Santa, the same character who trained you in the first game. His voice is appearing from this tiny mechanical bird, created to fly to a location and train a spy as they're walking. We tried to streamline many of the features into the campaign."

Here They Come...

By now, Cate (the game Cate that is, not the catwalk leftover) has left the mechanical bird and is hunkered down by a building. Her path is blocked by the patrol of a lone ninja woman. "There are environmental features that can tweak the AI to any threats. If I go up and hit this bell, the AI will be alerted to that and come over and investigate." Miller rather carelessly knocks a wind chime that is hung from the eaves outside the building and here comes the guard with katana in hand.

At this point the crescendo of stately Japanese music has alerted the player to the fact that something's hitting the fan. The ninja woman has called allies



and now the unfortunate bell-ringing Cate Archer is receiving a lesson in blades. "Music is dynamic to the action, it changes with the environment and the situation. As we approached the building, the music was tense but reserved because there were enemies nearby. Then it changed dramatically once the alarm was raised. The proximity of an enemy or enemies affects the music - so do their AI states. Also the length of time you've been in a place. All these things become apparent through the music. It's an important part of the game in the way that it communicates the emotion of the action."

Shoot Him in the Arse!

The enemies of No-one Lives Forever 2 have location based hit reactions. If you shoot them in the feet, they fall and grab for them. If you shoot them in the back or the arse, they lean back and recoil in response to that. In fact, the team has gone a long way to making NoLF 2 a ballet of innovative violence. No generic deaths here proclaims Miller, as he demonstrates what will become a classic example: "You have the ability to shoot people with certain weapons, the result being they stick to the walls. The body stays there until you go over and search them to retrieve your arrow. When you pull the arrow back, their body slumps onto the ground." It's slick, really slick.

Get Rid of the Bodies

But now there's a bleeding great body on the floor. Miller tells us "Now you can move bodies around in NoLF. Pick them up and pull them away to avoid detection, so that when another

guard comes by, they don't notice. You need to be much more alert this time around because the AI responds more accurately to your actions within the environment. They'll notice if things have been moved or if you make a sound." It seems the Fox Interactive team has not been shy in integrating some of the best bits of other games. The body removal harkens back to the Thief series and functions in the same way: to help our protagonist elude detection.

The next level we see is set in a tumbleweeded, broken-down-pick-up truck style trailer park set in Akron, Ohio. Of course, the scene is capped by the ninja assassin women. There's a number of tornados blowing everything around, kicking up dust and leaves and generally adding to the tension. Occasionally, a trailer flips over. "There's a lot of depth in the environments." Miller explains "It's fully interactive: light globes can be removed or shot out to create dark hiding places, fire extinguisher tanks can be shot out and they can stun enemies. You can also set off alarms."

This Message will Self-Destruct...

Cate has managed to flee her ninja assailants and is now inside a building looking for some hard copy. Through the course of a mission, Cate will be called on to make use of various skills within the environment. Rifling through a filing cabinet for top secret info falls under the Search ability. As Cate is carrying out the Search, a progress bar appears to let you know how long the search is taking. If the attempt to Search is ill-timed, or if Cate is too slow, she could be



caught by a nearby enemy.

In a design move reminiscent of Deus Ex, the skill attributes of Cate Archer can be upgraded as you progress through No-One Lives Forever 2. Miller continues: "As you complete objectives and sub objectives, you earn a certain amount of skill points for your efforts. These skill points are then applied to the abilities that you in the game. It's entirely up to the player to what degree those skill points are used to boost Cate's personal attributes. These abilities include stealth, searching (which makes the search quicker), carrying and stamina, among others."

Where to Use my Skills?

The education of Cate Archer through the game is most interesting when Miller tells us that, "Levels can be returned to after they've been completed. We have fully negotiable environments. In Siberia there are about three traversable areas where we get to a point, there's a dynamic load and then you're off to get another thing as part of a mission objective. But you'll have to come back to the area. In this way objectives can be completed subsequently which may not be possible when first encountered. It doesn't mean that every single mission is meant to be returned to but there will be elements there for those gamers who are looking for all the fine detail."

Miller is adamant that skill upgrades don't change areas nor would they make certain areas available that wouldn't be otherwise. "What the skill system does is change the way that people play the game. What we've found is that people approach the game in a totally different way with these

new skills and new weapons sets, the second time around. It creates this whole other level of freedom through the natural course of the game."

[Insert Spielberg Joke Here]

Miller details the strengths of the AI in No-one Lives Forever: "The AI system is built around a goal state. So the AI is fully aware of the environment and each has a set of objectives. A guard's primary objective might be to guard his post. But if nothing's going on, he does other things. He smokes a cigarette and when finished, he tosses it away. If patient gamers wait long enough, the guard may just need to go to the bathroom. This is an opportunity

Perhaps the coolest example of AI in NOLF 2 is the possibility of a Crying Wolf situation. A guard may spot Cate and run to his buddies saying "There's a Spy! There's a Spy!" If Cate takes off and hides, they'll come running in and look around. Sooner or later, they'll get bored, decide there's no spy and then return to their posts. If Cate scares the Guard again, he'll call his friends again. If this happens too much, the Guard's allies won't come to help him because they no longer believe him. The individual AI responds to one another as well as the actions of the player.



for Cate to sneak past him or sneak up on him and shock him. He may also get tired, start to stretch and fall asleep. However patient and into-the-game the player wants to get, there's this level of depth there.

"The AI is very aware of what is going on. It creates a new game every time you play through it. While the goals stay the same each time through, the way you go about them can be entirely different each time."

The last level of NOLF 2 demonstrated is set in the snow-covered plains of Siberia, which boasts falling snowflakes, warm breath effects and footprints. And of course, heavy Ruski accents - these are Communists after all. The music is all pizzicato strings with ominous timpani interjections. It is here that we glimpse the snowspeeder, a controllable vehicle. Other vehicles will be included but nothing is confirmed.

It's All Brand New

The interface has been entirely overhauled. There are lava lamp inspired menu screens in all parts of the game with loud yellows and oranges and groovy swirls. The soundtrack switches to an elevator music vibraphone. During play, the pause menu gives the player access all relevant intelligence, including maps, objectives,



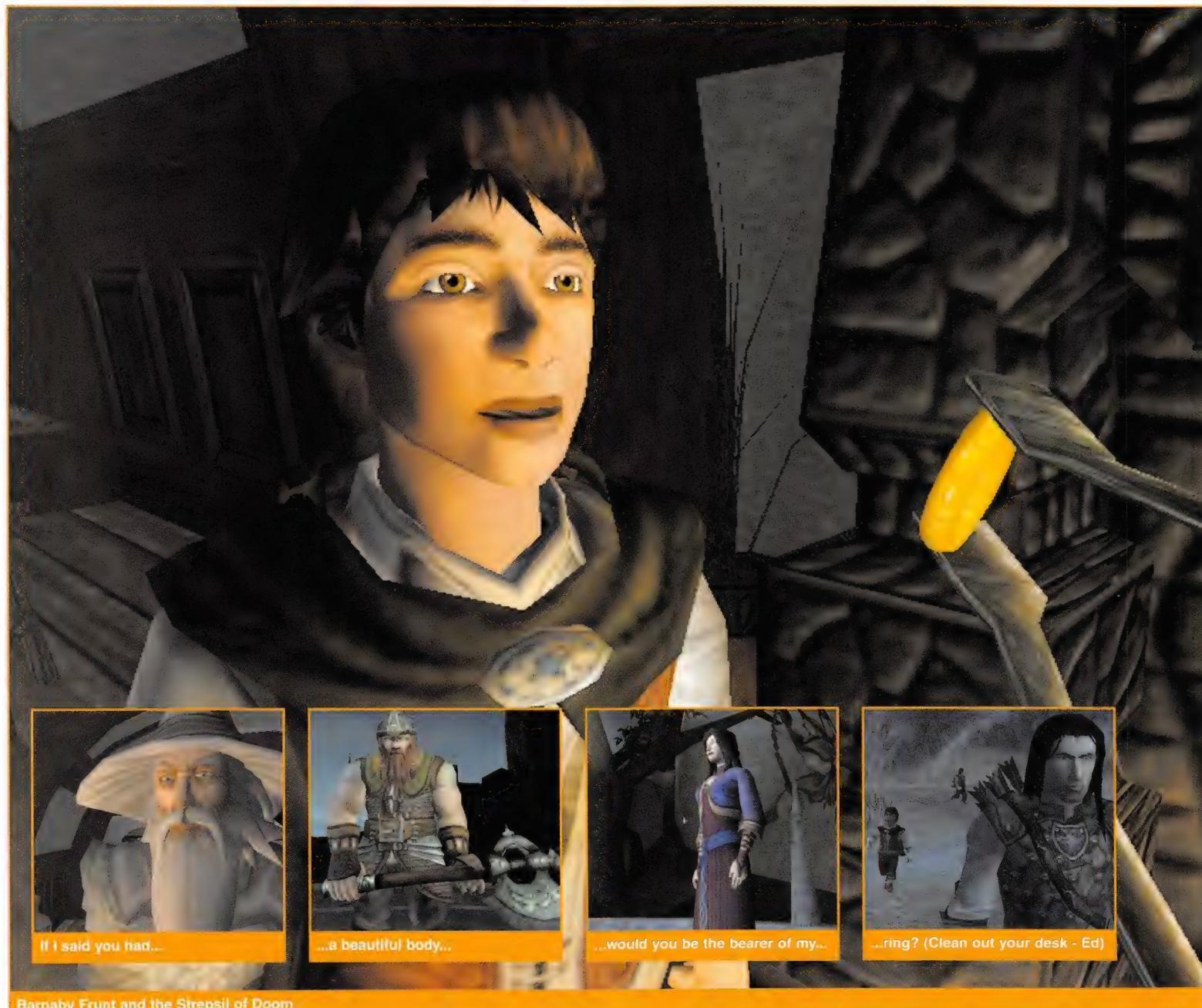
inventory and memos. Inventory items that Cate can exploit include a dynamic code breaker where you can watch the message being decoded on the fly. There's a banana as offensive weapon - you guessed it, slipping on the old banana peel stuns enemies. The laughing gas bomb makes our Russian friend in the Siberian level laugh hysterically before Cate guns him down.

I quiz Miller about the future of No-One Lives Forever. Will it be an Interstate 76 situation where Fox Interactive do Cate Archer in the 70s, complete with all that decade's stereotypes? "I don't think we'd do it the way people would automatically think that we would... like she would come out with an afro or whatever. But I think there's a range of directions we could go. Quite frankly there's so many good characters in No One Lives Forever. Armstrong, Volkov Bruno himself, Cate's mentor. In my mind, Bruno's an entire game just by himself. The main thing is the story is so open; we have so many ways to go. It all depends on how well this game goes..." On the strength of what's on display here, there's little doubt Cate Archer - or maybe some others from the game, will ride again in a third installment.

John Dewhurst



The Lord of The Rings: Fellowship of the Ring The Book The Game



Barnaby Frunt and the Strepsil of Doom

The gaming industry has only just begun to tap into the wealth of material that belongs to the Tolkien trust. With the highly successful release of Peter Jackson's version of the Fellowship of the Ring, cracking the egg, so to speak, we can look forward to more hobbit adventuring before you can say "second breakfast".

The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring, the Book or LOTRTBTG (thankfully there's no The T-Shirt in there as well) manages to combine the main

elements of the novel's plot with simple puzzle/adventure type gameplay. All the Fellowship characters are here: the hobbits Frodo, Merry, Pippin and Sam. Gimli the dwarf, Legolas the elf, Boromir and Aragorn the two men and the wizard Gandalf.

While you never have to control more than one character, at certain points in the game you swap to a different character, that being Frodo, Gandalf or Aragorn. Appropriately, these three all have different combat strengths and weaknesses. Aragorn

is useful with his sword, can kick and has a bow with unlimited arrows. Gandalf relies on five spells; fireball, lightning, an area effect knock out, confuse and a heal. Gandalf also has a weapon and can deliver a nasty death stab to an orc that's lying on the ground stunned. Frodo, equipped with Sting (his elven sword that glows blue whenever orcs are nearby) can make a few deadly thrusts but must also rely on sneaking and throwing rocks to distract enemies so he can slip past. Frodo has to use this tactic to evade

the Nazgul, the evil undead servants of the Dark Lord Sauron. The game is primarily played in third person but you can switch to first person mode to make it easier to target with range weapons (bow and spells).

Here we go, here we go!

The game starts in the hobbit village of Hobbiton and takes you across Middle Earth through the main plot points in the book and ends where the adventurers are fighting on the shores of the Anduin river. Along the way you'll go through Green Hill and

Withywindle Path where you'll encounter Old Man Willow and Tom Bombadil. At the Barrow Downs, there are several encounters with Barrow Wights, then the town of Bree where you meet up with Aragorn. On Weathertop Mountain Aragorn has his first fight with the Nazgul (the Dark Riders and servants of Sauron) and is appropriately atmospheric. The party then moves onto Rivendell where the full Fellowship is formed. Hollin Gate is where Aragorn battles the lake monster while Gandalf tries to open the entrance to the Mines of Moria. Moria itself is a huge gloomy labyrinth of corridors, bridges and tunnels. Lothlorien is the elven tree city and here you meet the particularly well rendered fellowship.

On this great journey east across Middle Earth you will fight wolves, orcs, trolls, a lake monster, the fire demon Balrog and the Nazgul.

Sometimes you have the whole party of adventurers at your disposal, other times only one companion and on occasion you have to go it alone. NPCs in your party don't die or take damage which makes combat fairly simplistic. It's a matter of left mouse click to use your sword and right mouse click to use range weapon or spells. Spells are highly effective but mana conservation is important.

Resist Temptation

There are times in the game where it seems like a good idea to have Frodo slip on the ring and disappear, but as in the book, it is a perilous thing to do. Frodo's purity against the ring's corruption is on a timer and he can only wear it for short periods before succumbing to the ring, ending the game. Flames appear around the periphery, closing in tighter and tighter as Sauron searches for you. Like the book, the temptation to wear the Ring at times of danger does manifest, but it will get you into more trouble than if you'd tried another way. As Frodo explains to Boromir who wants to use the Ring to save Gondor, the easiest road is not always the right road to take.

Yup, it looks and sounds like Lord of the Rings

Graphically the game shines. Attention to detail and effort has been made to create the different locations that the Fellowship travels

through. Each locality has its own atmosphere and "look". The village of Hobbiton is charmingly rural, with satisfying details in the decorations on the round front doors of the hobbit houses and the vegetable and flower patches. Even the signs outside each house have the number and name of the occupant. Frodo's residence, Bag End is a spacious and grand residence, with round doorways, and tree roots forming part of the walls. No wonder his cousin, Lobelia Sackville-Bagins was envious.

Shadows are life like and convincing. When Frodo must find his friends in the Barrow Downs, the graphics convey a desolate foreboding place, where the barrow wights rise up out of the ground as wisps of smoke. Moria is a huge, cavernous labyrinth of tunnels, bridges and corridors with bones from long lost battles scattered about. There are holes in the floors that appear bottomless. The Orcs look similar to that seen in the movie and the Balrog is an impressively huge fire demon boss mob. The Elven city of Lothlorien is a finely crafted and beautiful abode built in the trees. The Nazgul, servants of

Dark Riders, not so dark

A part of the game that doesn't seem in the spirit of the book is the Dark Riders. In the game you need to throw rocks towards the Nazgul to distract them while you sneak past, which makes them not much of a foreboding enemy. A mention of this to Vivendi saw a swift reply from Reid Withnell, Associate Product Manager, who said: "This is one of those situations where developers have to introduce gameplay elements while still maintaining a sense of the original source material. Although it seems odd, it did strike me as a very Hobbity thing to do. Even in the film, in the battle with the cave-troll in Moria, the Hobbits were employing some rather slapstick combat techniques. And I suppose the rock-chucking would potentially work - as scary as they were, if you remember there was that one scene outside the Shire where a Nazgul couldn't even detect the Hobbits that were in a log right below his horse's hooves."



I have to live with this kind of thing in my local park every Friday



In Tolkein's case, a picture is worth 26 densely typed pages



Every time you make a fart joke, God kills a kitten

Sauron, look deadly and evil - their horses are imposing black steeds, bridle and saddle adorned with skulls, eyes glowing red.

The faces of each character are remarkable. Each hobbit, human, elf and dwarf have unique features and clothes. Their noses are convincingly lifelike, the eyes open and close within realistic eyesockets and the cloak is a separate 3D object that billows as the character turns and moves. It must be noted that there seemed to be a similarity between some of the character's faces and those of the actors in the movie, especially Legolas and Gimli.

Sound in this game ranges from background ambient music, foreboding and gloomy in the Mines of Moria to cheerful and lighthearted in Hobbiton. There are effects such as footfalls, swords striking, wolves howling, cries and shouts. Dialogue although limited conveys character:

Gandalf is stern and wise, Aragorn is valiant and resolute, while the hobbits think only of their stomachs. Merry and Pippin are cheeky and looking out for adventure, while Sam is loyal and trustworthy with a desire to see wondrous things like the elves.

Not every single plot point is in the game, for example, there's no wild ride on horseback for the elf Glorfindel who carries the injured Frodo to the house of Elrond, with Nazgul in hot pursuit. Neither is Saruman's evil machinations a part of the game, nor Boromir's attempt to take the ring from Frodo.

Although aimed at younger audiences, Tolkien aficionados should still be satisfied with the quality graphics and story line. What is Moria like? How's Gandalf going to fight the Balrog? Well, you'll just have to wait for the release to find out.

Ruth Lawrence

Blood Rayne

Sex. Violence. We love.

Nowadays, PC games are the realm of the Puritan Marketeer. Guns and Blood are fine, especially if it's in the killing of the great enemy of the Past (Nazis) or Terrorists (the New Nazis) but SEX - no way. Leave it to e-mail, leave to prime time. Whatever you do, leave it out of games. Ratings bodies are as notorious for their puritanical stance as their complete misunderstanding of games and the people who play them. A publisher would be INSANE to provoke the wrath of the small L liberals of the world.

And here's BloodRayne, a third person action game that takes the violence we love and the sex the OFLC hates and blends them until creamy smooth. Imagine: melons bulging through tightly fitting rubber (or leather or whipped cream) outfits, vampiric hell chicks kicking the stuffing and sucking the life out of their enemies, stylized Nazi and deformed monsters. Dismemberment, fountains of blood, steely gazes, big guns, knife licking... you name it, it's here. And it's a blast.



A little slap, without the tickle



I just love these kind of parties

The Game: Sex

It's the 1940s apparently, a time when vampires and fascism were all the rage. Like a plot straight out of a game set in Castle Wolfensomthing, Hitler is using the Occult to advance the cause of racial purity. I call him Hitler but he's actually some evil mastermind named Jurgen Wulf. Hitler just sounds better. By contrast, the eponymous hero is part seductress creature of the night, part vampire. The human female side of BloodRayne means we

can root for her (ahem, I think you mean barrack for her? ...-Ed.) while her vampire side means she has powers to kick eight shades of hell out of all the Nazis and

monsters, Herr Wossname plans to throw in her way.

BloodRayne can jump a clear 20 feet in the air, execute acrobatic manoeuvres and swing a mean set of blades, attached to her forearms. But that's not all. She can jump and tumble, hew and fisticuff. Being a vampire, she can feast on the flesh of the living. Also in her bag of tricks is bullet time ability, Aura Vision to check the blood potency of her victims and also Zoom Vision. With these abilities, her vision distorts to view X-rayed creatures through walls, revealing their skeleton and as well as the proximity of targets. Cooool. She's a mighty versatile killing machine.

They'll never like this I thought

It's a good thing she's so talented. The various enemies, both Nazi and "monster", are distinctly smarter than most we've seen before. If they're outclassed or badly wounded, enemies will turn tail and flee. We understand the various agents of darkness will also coordinate actions to plan ambushes, seek out allies and reinforcements - even use BloodRayne's weapons against



her. Curse them!

That's alright because they're gonna get a right chopping up when BloodRayne gets close enough. Should the lusty heroine slash an enemy, an arm may well fly off, then a leg, maybe a head and before you know what's happening there's a bloody great mess on the walls and a smelly pile of post-Nazi, boots and clothing. Occasionally she must feed on the blood of the living to sustain her. This is shown by a Bloodlust metre. If it falls too low, she dies.

This is where her special feeding ability comes in. When a foe is sufficiently beaten down, BloodRayne can feed on them, thus restoring her health. No word on whether monster blood is as nutritious as Nazi blood. If she decides to drink a little too much blood, BloodRayne goes into BloodRage, dishing out some especially high damage for her half vampire home-girls back at da coffin. A talented girl like this must travel.

Racial purity goes too far

Through the course of the game, BloodRayne jets across the globe to levels that include the swampy bayous of Louisiana, the Argentine

Spurious Speculations: Six Months from Now: BloodRayne gets Banned!

In a move that shocked no-one, BloodRayne was today officially given an Unclassified Certificate. Decreed as "loathsome", retailers have been forced to pull copies from shelves just days before release. Parents everywhere can rest assured that their children are safe from vampires and Nazis. The same children still have a wide range of porn and homemade explosive options open to them via the Internet, however. In related news, The Daily Telegraph today published three pages of "massage parlour" ads in their classifieds.

temple, the submarine facility in Germany and, of course, a castle overrun with vampires who don't like half-castes. It's the cliquy ones that die first every time, no matter how old they are.

The action is refreshingly basic. No fancy mission objectives here - just run head first in the buggers, remember to suck some blood when the band aids start tearing and sooner or later you'll reach a boss. The somersaulting movements, backflips and combos of BloodRayne, together with the various Special abilities promise enough variety to counter the repetitive nature of this type of game. Combined with the clever trousers enemy A.I., BloodRayne is shaping up to be a racy, blood soaked action extravaganza.

But will we ever see it?

Some of us liked it at E3 and some of us loved the code on show at ECTS. Those who attended the former reported issues with the camera control, while for the latter (myself), this didn't present a problem. The ECTS build was really very impressive and this is just the kind of game PC gamers haven't seen recently due to the avalanche of FPS, strategy and Sims titles.

Seeing our heroine wrapping her long legs around the waist of an enemy to suck the life out of them elicited peels of laughter from the Australian games contingent. The Italian journalists, maybe didn't get it...and the OFLC with an average age of 30-something (and rising) may not either. So take a look while you can. These are the screenshots of a game you may not see... at least until it's edited down.

John Dewhurst



I hate blind dates



The course of true love never did run smooth



It's so difficult trying to deal with people



Love your nails, you must be a Libra

Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets

Developer: KnowWonder Publisher: EA Distributor: TBA Available: Spring 2002

ou might think that the 'gaming lite' experience that is Harry Potter and the hardcore action of Unreal have little to do with each other, but you'd be horribly wrong. The next game in the Potter chronicles, Harry Potter and The Chamber of Secrets, uses the Unreal engine as its foundation.

For the lucky PC Gamers out there the PC version in many ways is superior to the other incarnations of the game, while unique and quite a notable game in its own right. The game is designed differently to the other console versions of the licence in that the PC version uses much more of a detailed interaction model.

Some of the variations derive from the mouse interface, which makes for a more involved control system, allowing the player to do so much more than it has warranted a totally different style of game.

Primarily, the game still uses an over the head 3rd person view, but has more sophisticated elements such as context sensitive spell targeting. A good example of this is when you come across a 'Spongify' pad on the floor. If you wave the cursor across this the cursor will suggest you cast the correct spell to use the pad, which is an excellent aid and one of the technical advantages of the PC platform.

Once Upon a Time

As one would expect, being based on the film players have to work through Harry's second year at Hogwarts and learn all of the new spells with the Masters. By using a key press combination similar to the music puzzles in games such as Dance Dance Revolution you are able to learn and then later test these spells throughout the game. After you successfully master these you go into a dungeon level where you use them in a number of challenging situations.

HPCOS has been structured by completing levels against the clock, which also makes it more challenging with the player being given greater rewards and measured in house points, depending on how fast you get through each level. There are also "challenge-stars" which are hidden throughout the levels and players get bonuses for obtaining these.

New spells help make the game varied and offer a sense of development as the game proceeds. The plot is also driven forward as levels are completed and the dungeons are extensively explored.

Author On Board

This game has received a great deal of input from Harry Potter's author, JK Rowling. The advantage of Rowling's advice is evident as a lot of the content and design which is outside the bounds of the original fiction, presents no real problem and works seamlessly in the style of the stories. According to game developer Derek Proud, Rowling also offered a substantial amount of fiction that has never been published in the books or the films. One of Rowlings 'game-only' additions is an impressive animal called the Gytrash which is a ghostly hound and ferocious nemesis. Residing mainly in the forests and aided by many

spectral effects, this creature is the sort of detail that improves an already in-depth landscape.

Something for everyone.. almost

While the target market for this game is quite young, there are still aspects of HPCOS that gamers from a hard core will enjoy. Hard-core or novice, player will appreciate this game for the sense of showmanship and humour employed to keep things entertaining. Liberties have been artfully taken with scenes where scourge spells are used to get rid of ghostly ectoplasm, and the climactic end scene works extremely well where one is forced to fight the Basilisk.

Ultimately, the only group likely to be disappointed are the hardcore Harry Potter fanatics, who sadly may howl when they discover the cast of the movie are replaced by 'soundalikes' for all the voiceovers. But then you can't please everyone.

Shari Davies



Now's our chance to kill that annoying redheaded child actor!

Caution: Aussie at work

The games industry is a pretty amazing business. It is hard to get into a major development team and get a deal involving a massive name, like Harry Potter, but this industry also amply supports the adage 'where there is a will there is a way'. We have known Derek Proud for many years and remember when he was a pimply (sorry DI) young PR guy at Ozisoft. Derek decided to have a shot at getting somewhere in the games business and having worked at EA's now defunct Aussie development facility in Queensland, he managed to snag himself a gig working in the UK for EA. Derek proves it can be done, so don't be afraid of having a dip at your dream.



It's easy to create an effective scene when someone's already done all the writing for you...

Empire Earth: The Art of Conquest

Developer: Sierra ■ Publisher: Vivendi ■ Distributor: TBA ■ Available: Now

Empire Earth becomes Empire Earth-But-Also-In-Space.

The original Empire Earth was a major success for Rick Goodman (creator of Age of Empires) and Stainless Steel Studios. The game sold over a million units worldwide and was a hit in all the major markets for Real Time Strategy around the world, including the United States, Germany, Asia Pacific and of course, Australia. Is it any surprise that we now have an expansion for the RTS straddling the far reaches of human endeavour? Well no.

Ancient Arts of War

The checkered history of expansions takes a turn for the better with The Art of Conquest. This expansion pack adds new elements to each and every civilisation in the game, including new units, new buildings or even new abilities for existing units. Here also will be three entirely new campaigns.

The first campaign is a romp from the Roman Era: it follows the rise of Julius Caesar and his cronies from the establishment of city states to the height of the Roman Empire's power. There is also the Pacific Theatre (in imposing capitals) of World War II where the allies fought the Japanese and finally the Space Age, where Sierra imagines the

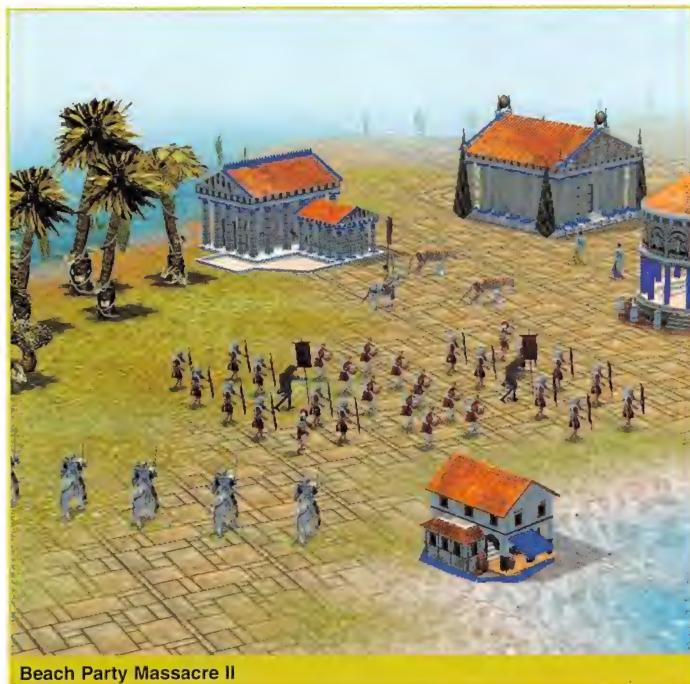
future for us. It's all rocket ships and spacemen, we understand.

"The STAAARS...."

Each of these new campaigns features many more new units especially suited to their new settings. The Space Age itself is an entirely new epic at the end of the game, where the Earth has been conquered, now the target is the planets, especially Mars...

Slow moving Capital Ships have a devastating Beam of Death power to remind you of Star Wars. The Cyber Ninja can plant Logic Bombs that disable enemy buildings for a short period of time. There are also ICBM silos that can fire nuclear missiles across space and end your enemies with a bang - watch out for the anti-missile defences.

The campaign that sparked the most interest amongst our strategy camp was The Pacific Theatre which has barely featured in strategy gaming of late... or of ever. The whole caper starts at Pearl Harbour and ends around Iwo Jima. So the style of strategy is quite different - rather than the miles and miles of dirt and trenches that appear in the parade of Western Front strategy games, here we have a lot of island hopping, jungle fighting, dysentery and other fun things.



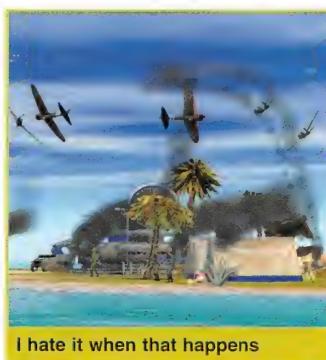
"We will Fight them on the Beaches..."

One new unit is the Flame Throwing Tank, a bloody great iron dragon, while more mobile is the new Radio Man who can call in marine parachuting air support for an instant injection of troops. There's also a new submarine hunting ship, the Catalina and the Dauntless Dive Bomber, perfect for harassing Destroyers. Ultra cool is the SAS commando, a covert unit that can swim through water and plant super powerful explosives on pesky buildings. This theatre of war is really underrepresented in games right now and we're looking forward to the Empire Earth treatment.

The Art of Conquest will feature terrain scarring from such things as mortar attacks and

boasts DirectX 8.1 optimisation, so it runs faster and looks a little sweeter. The Empire Earth enclave of the office is slavering like the dogs they are, over the forthcoming Art of Conquest.

John Dewhurst



Casino Empire

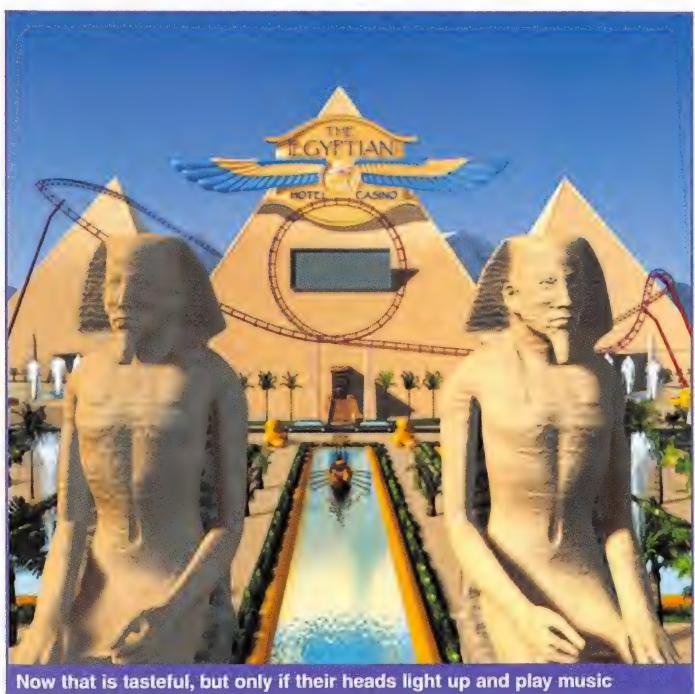
Developer: Sierra ■ **Publisher:** Vivendi ■ **Distributor:** TBA ■ **Available:** TBA



A llow us to register our general distaste for gambling and the social problems it causes. While seeming to encourage gambling, we take consolation in the fact that Casino Empire may distract actual gamblers from using any real gambling facilities, at least temporarily. This management sim set on the Las Vegas strip may be a little less than relevant to Australian gamers, let alone Oz



Planet Golfball and the Urinal Cakes of Doom?



Now that is tasteful, but only if their heads light up and play music

gamblers. Where's the pub with a dance floor replaced with rows of pokies? Where's the TAB and Keno? Who the hell knows what Texas Hold 'Em is?

It's a Card Game, You Pansy

In any case, the concept of Casino Empire is to manage a series of successful Las Vegas casinos, with all the usual strife that management sims pose. That is, dealing with the hunger, vomit, criminal activities and waning interest of the people whose money you're trying to earn. In this respect, Casino Empire is no different from any of the other Zoo, Rollercoaster, City Tycoon games. BUT (notice that word's in capitals), one of Sierra's oldest lines is the Hoyle's Brand, games I never played, but which sold rather nicely and was a treat for the aficionados of parlour games. So mix up your People Skills with a few carefully placed games of Roulette or cards and viola! A sim game with a genuine twist.

Casino Empire offers eight playable casinos, each based on a real world casino stealing the food from babies' mouths in Vegas. Beginning with the Golden Nugget casino, a modest country RSL size venue and progressing through the pyramidal Egyptian, to the Medieval and finally to the

Solid Gold, the American equivalent of Star City (only about a million times bigger).

How do I Expand my Business?

Each casino has specific objectives to complete. Attract a certain number of clients or land a great headlining act like Kamahl or Build a crapload of pokies. When these are completed, the player can progress to the bigger casinos, while unlocking various new features that can be used in the design of your casino like new dÉcor, new games or machines and new clientele.

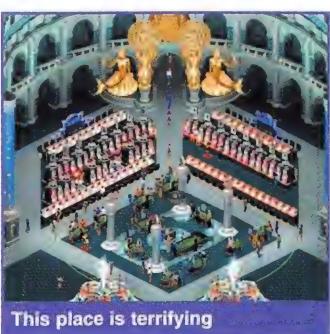
Games you can place around your casino include Blackjack, Roulette, Craps, Pai Gow, poker and slot machines. Of course, there are complex algorithms running under this game that ensure if you place the high rollers room next to a bank of pokies, you'll go under like Enron. There's staff to be hired, toilets to keep clean and pockets to empty.

Blow up the Pokies

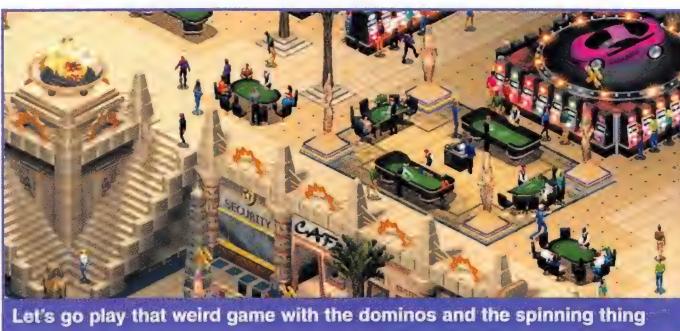
Of course, it wouldn't be casinos without some underhanded dealings. Your competitors in the biz will want to do you in so naturally you must respond in kind. Your hard earned dollars can be spent spying on and sabotaging the operations of your competitors. Organised crime also features, with mob consultants ready to do business once you get big enough.

The jewel in the crown is surely the chance to play casino style games at your own tables. Showgirls, mobsters, crime and gambling. The execution looks entirely competent if via the bland isometrics we've come to know and love. Look forward to a review in coming months.

John Dewhurst



This place is terrifying



Let's go play that weird game with the dominos and the spinning thing

REAL-TIME STRATEGY WITH THE WEAPONS OF TODAY'S MILITARY

REAL WAR

AIR

LAND

SEA

ROGUE STATES



COMING SOON
BASED ON THE OFFICIAL
JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF
TRAINING GAME DEVELOPED
FOR THE U.S. MILITARY

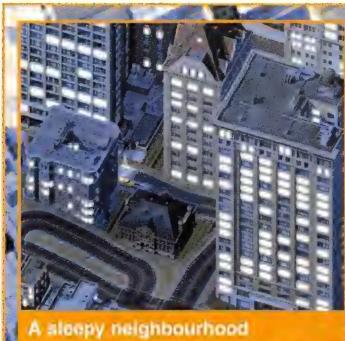
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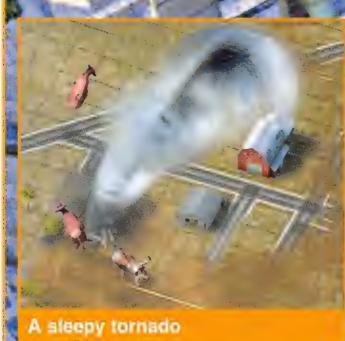
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Sim City 4

Developer: Maxis ■ Publisher: EA ■ Distributor: TBA ■ Available: TBA



A sleepy neighbourhood



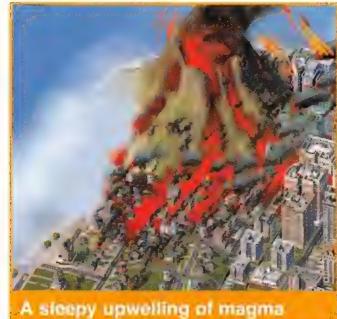
A sleepy tornado



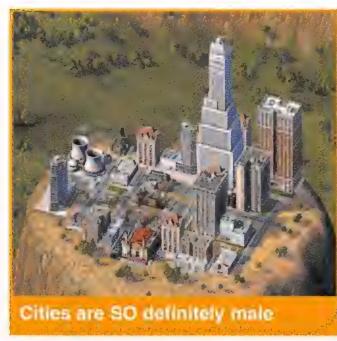
Away with the fairies? I'm away with the hotdogs!



A sleepy seaport



A sleepy upwelling of magma



Cities are SO definitely male

Longevity is a tough word in this business. All too often game companies hit on a big idea, milk it for all they can while the property is hot and then walk away from the gutted corpse of the concept once the game has lost its appeal with the masses. A few games have managed to live beyond this cycle, but they are far and few between. However even amongst these few titles Sim City 4 is a standout effort as it feels like it has and always will be with us in one form or another and the latest incarnation looks set to continue the trend.

In the Eye of the Beholder

Right off the bat those of you who are keen to see changes in Sim City 4 will be pleased to note that the visuals have been improved considerably. The use of a 3D engine, even though it hasn't translated to freeform 3D camera movement, has meant much better looking buildings and other scenery.

It is also interesting to note that despite the game's already legendary mass market appeal it looks like Maxis have tried to make it even more accessible. In this vein Sim City 4 features better onscreen help and the game also makes it easier to judge, even by just looking at the state of the buildings, how

well or badly you are doing.

The game also makes laying the foundations of your metropolis far less of an arduous task. Streets, railways, power lines and water supplies can be laid out manually or the game will join the dots and manage this more menial stuff for you.

You're nicked Sonny-Jim

However there are also some aspects of Sim City 4 which have been tweaked to give you more in depth gameplay. For example you cannot completely control crime by just plonking police stations all over the place. Instead you might want to think about the causes of crime, like poverty, and try to improve the neighbourhoods where people are struggling to make a good living.

Keeping it Simple

The use of an area of effect ring to indicate the vicinity served by a particular building is also a good move. If you want to know how well the area is covered by the new police station you have built then you only need look at the perimeter ring that indicates the extent of a particular amenity's reach. This is a very welcome thing indeed as it helps you more accurately target and resolve regional problems like

Sim integration

The Sims and Sim City might seem like distant cousins at best, but that is not the case with Sim City 4. Even though you are controlling a massive city with a huge population you will be able to take a number of characters from The Sims and toss them into the bowels of your metropolis. Your Sims will then thrive or perish depending on how well you manage the city. This is not just a gimmicky idea either. The ability to check in on your Sims character will also make it easier for you to judiciously assess how well you are doing in the neighbourhood where your Sim is living in a very personal way. You can finally feel safe in the knowledge that the buggers get up on time for work without constantly having to nursemaid them.

crime, inadequate schooling or insufficient hospital access.

The increased attention to detail is also very obvious. You can see cars actually stopping for traffic lights, there are different architecture styles for different historical periods and even the gardens look lusher than ever before.

Sim City 4 promises to be more than a makeover for Sim City 3000, so it might be time to get out that dusty mayoral hat and sash before the game lands.

Steve Polak



A detailed 3D rendering of Master Chief, the protagonist of the Halo video game series. He is wearing his iconic green and black armor, including a helmet with orange visor, and is holding a large, dark, cylindrical object, likely a plasma rifle or energy sword. The background is a star-filled space with a distant planet visible.

GameCube

Nintendo

PC

PlayStation 2

Game Boy Advance

PSOne

YOUR GUIDE TO THE
FUTURE OF GAMING
AND BEYOND!

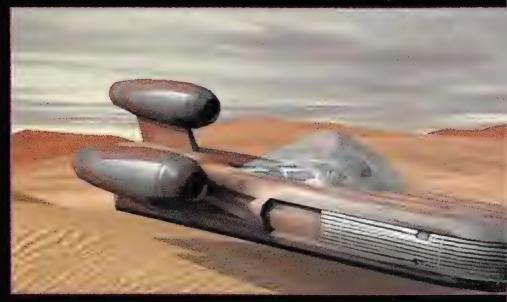
HYPER

AUSTRALIA'S GAMING AUTHORITY

STAR WARS GALAXIES INTERVIEW WITH TOM SARRIS: //DIRECTOR_PR_LUCASARTS



Who could have guessed with the release of Star Wars in 1976 that one day we would be able to experience the wonders of George Lucas' universe in real time across a global network in gorgeous 3D? With expectations of one million plus users, a certain galaxy a long time ago, far, far away is about to become the holiday destination of a lifetime. **Jere Lawrence** speaks with Tom Sarris to book his next vacation.





JL: Why is Lucasarts doing a lot more external rather than internal development?

TS: For a couple of reasons. It's certainly no secret nor have we shied away from the fact that the period 2-4 years ago was not the best in the company's history. I think we lost focus in development and over saturated the market with games that maybe should not have been done. We took some risks - some worked and some didn't. These days we're trying to make each Star Wars release much more of an event and place them in a much more unique position then they had been in that 2-4 year range. The best way to ensure an absolutely top notch, top gaming experience is to go out and partner with other companies who are premier in certain genres. A good example of this is Raven Studios who we partnered with to do Stars Wars Jedi Outcast. They have an incredible pedigree, having done Soldier of Fortune 1 & II, Elite force and have recently been chosen to do Quake IV, so who better to partner with? I don't think it compromises Lucasarts as a company to partner with someone else who has a good game engine nor is it an admission of defeat.

JL: How's your relationship with Verant going? More specifically, are they enforcing their flawed Everquest principle of 'keep them playing to keep them paying'? How much control does Lucasarts have in Star Wars Galaxies and are they keeping Verant in check?

TS: Absolutely. Lucasarts has a great deal of control because at the end of the day it's our game. It has Lucasarts logo on the package and our reputation is riding on it. One thing I can say in Verant's defence is that they've certainly benefited from what they've learnt from Everquest and think they'll continue to learn on a daily basis. I don't think they've shied away from the fact that it's been a struggle at times and

admit they could have handled a lot of aspects of EQ better.

I can tell you that we're going to do everything we can to ensure players have the best experience possible. Will there be issues that come up that people may find fault in? Absolutely. It's impossible to have a game that large without issues coming up. Like I said, we're well aware of some of the issues that Verant have encountered and given the fact that they're involved we're going to be watching pretty carefully.

JL: After the game is released, will Lucasarts be prepared to listen to the players in regard to problems or will Lucasarts insist on sticking to its "Vision"?

TS: Oh no, I can tell you there'll never be an arrogance about overlooking things or giving players short shrift, not respecting players. Like I said, it's impossible for there not to be issues, but I think everyone's going to be mindful of things that have happened in the past and try to down play or minimise those as best we can.

JL: The essential MMORPG question. Casual vs. Hardcore gamers.

TS: Good question. That's something that we feel very strongly about. In other words we want there to be a good balance between satisfying the veterans of the genre, the folks who've played a lot of Everquest and games like that but not to the exclusion of new players. We want it to be a satisfying experience for people who can only play briefly, say only 2-3 hours a week. That's something that's been on the minds of the developers since day one. We absolutely want new players to feel like the game is accessible, that they're not going to be preyed upon by experienced players. We're going to be most vigilant about ensuring that veteran players and new players can co-exist side by side happily.

JL: Here's a situation that has occurred to me which hopefully SWG will address. If a bunch of

friends want to play together but can't devote the same amount of time each day or are differently skilled, will they be able to continue to play together even at different levels?

TS: Yes they will. Specifically I can't tell you yet, there are people who could tell you but because I'm not as involved on the game on a daily basis I couldn't even venture to try to tell you how that's going to be balanced, but certainly A it will be addressed and B it's something we will be talking about in the coming months prior to the game's release.

JL: How big are the zones in the game?

TS: Funny you ask that because we're just now in the first phase of beta and someone jogged from one end of Tatooine to another (you've got to love players don't you? -JL) without stopping to interfere with any other person or NPC and it took something like 55 minutes to run.

JL: So they're big zones - huge even?

TS: Yeah they are. It's just inconceivable to me that there's a game that big. The worlds are 4 times larger than anything in Everquest and I think reduced zoning is going to make for a very satisfying play experience.

JL: Do you have enough servers? Is there enough capital to add extra servers if there's a large number of players?

TS: Absolutely. Guaranteed. Having partners like SOE, they really wanted to oversee the whole server issue. We're not really worried at any level with their ability to add server space if need be. As far as the numbers are concerned, obviously we're hoping that we can do numbers that Everquest has seen. Would we be happy if we exceeded that? Of course, absolutely.

JL: If in Everquest it takes you 6 months to get to level 50 and another 6 months to get level to 60. What can players expect from SWG? What is the levelling treadmill like?

TS: There's no 'leveling' in Star Wars Galaxies. We have a skill-based system, rather than a level-based system. Some skills will be easier to acquire than others, some will be more time-intensive, etc. The concept of the 'high-end' game is also totally different. In EQ and other level-based games, the high-end game is played by the high-level players; everyone else is barred from that content. Our high-end game will revolve more around your standing with various groups in the universe, including the Hutt's, the Empire, the Rebel Alliance - even Ewok tribes. As you complete missions for a particular group, you'll gain access to continually more difficult and rewarding missions from the group.

JL: In regard to staff, are there any familiar names involved in the development of SWG?

TS: Well, Richard Vogel from UO is on board as the Executive Producer as well as Raph 'Designer Dragon' Koster is a lead designer.

JL: How's Raph going? UO was so ahead of its time in terms of its skill system that was developed by Raph. Has he brought any of his unique aspects of development to SWG?

TS: Yes, I really think so. I think that's the other reason why we've got some people on board who while they may not have been directly in Everquest they certainly see some of the issues that people had with it and are in a place to effect a difference and to effect a change so that some of those issues can be corrected or never become an issue. I think that's one advantage we've had, we have this all star line up of developers of people who were involved in Everquest and UO. Certainly there were not any bigger MMORPGs then those 2 games and when you roll those into 1 you get people who are well aware of what they've done and what they want to do to take the genre to the next level.

BATTLEFIELD 1942

INTERVIEW WITH KEN BALTHASER

//PRODUCER_BF1942



It is quite possibly the most significant multiplayer co-operative combat game to be released this year and as well as getting to play and love it we spoke to Ken Balthaser the producer. Steve Polak dons his khakis and heads off into the mayhem.



The good people behind one of the most incredible games to date are Swedish, and to achieve the Nordic experience we put a response through a swedish chef converter. Bork, bork, bork.

Ken Balthaser: Juhun Perssun, zee

leed prugremmer und oone-a ooff zee oreeginel deseegners fur zee prudooot, tuuk ixtreme-a preede-a in prugremmeeng zee feheecles cuntruls. I theenk zee team stroock a perfect belunce-a betveeee reeleesm und ercede-a. Um gesh dee bork!

PCPP: The main focus is multiplayer action but tell us about single player play? In single player mode will there be multiple narrative paths, and how will the story be shown? How will it unfold for the player?

Ken Balthaser: Unlike many other FPS shooters with a liner story line, BF1942 allows the player to jump into any of 16 maps and play with unscripted bots.

PCPP: Tell us about the Refractor 2 engine, and why it is exciting for you guys? What does it enable you to do?

Ken Balthaser: Refractor 2 was one of the primary reasons EA picked up this title. When Dice first presented the engine to us 2+ years ago, we knew they were onto something special. Refractor 2 offers up the ability have large maps with lots of players and the big one - the ability to include vehicles.

PCPP: What do you think are the coolest features in 1942?

Ken Balthaser: I think the coolest part of BF1942 besides immersing you in a wide-open land, air and sea battle are just the moments that you see in every game. From shooting a jeep with a tank and watching the debris come flying at you as you blast the gunner on top to running through Market Garden and having the fuselage of a B17 come crashing down on your head. Or if you are fighting in Asia how about taking your zero and strafing a bunch of foot soldiers trying to get out of a base. Or how about shooting down the Zero with a massive 16-inch coastal battery - which is something I have seen which is very funny.

PCPP: What was hardest to 'get right' during the game's development?

Ken Balthaser: The sheer size of the game is a beast and trying to shove all the data and physics through limited bandwidth can be problematic. So our focus now is more optimization of the net code and client prediction for lag and bullet detection.

PCPP: Is lag proving to be a hard issue to solve?

Ken Balthaser: NO! It just takes a lot of work, especially with a game of this size, squeezing everything

we can out of the packets without compromising the game experience is challenging. But DICE has some of the best programming resources available, so I feel confident we can continue to improve in this area.

PCPP: What's the relationship between Codename Eagle & 1942?

Ken Balthaser: They are lovers. Seriously, Code Named Eagle was the predecessor to BF1942 and to be honest was one of the main reasons EA signed the title. The game play in CE was incredible, although not many people experienced it. We married the game play of CE to the new engine and saw the potential.

PCPP: How have you managed to capture the essence of the very different theatres of war you are fighting in?

Ken Balthaser: DICE deserves all the credit here, specifically Romain and Stephan. Romain (lead designer) and his design team had a vision from the start (which many of us were skeptical of) and as the game progressed through

development we began to see the vision come to life. Stephan, the lead artist had the daunting task of creating unique looks for the individual theatres and I know the development team spent an enormous amount of pre-production time researching and gathering reference material so they could really capture the feel.

PCPP: What lengths have you gone to to develop realistic and believable artificial intelligence? What sorts of AI behaviors have you programmed into computer-controlled enemies?

Ken Balthaser: The AI is broken up into 2 main areas; strategic AI and tactical AI. The strategic AI gives the players instructions for equipment selection, vehicles, hot spots and waypoints. Once the bot gets into battle, his tactical AI takes over for combat. This allows the game to flow and play differently every time. Where most FPS games have to worry about foot soldier AI, we had to also make sure the bots were able to continue combat in all the vehicles. So AI tanks, planes, ships, jeeps, APC are all in the mix giving the user the

feeling of raging battle.

PCPP: Tell us more about the vehicle interaction? How much of an effort has been made to make these vehicles realistic in terms of handling, firepower and protection? How will subs and sea warfare work?

Ken Balthaser: Johan Persson, the lead programmer and one of the original designers for the product, took extreme pride in programming the vehicles controls and physics. I think the team struck a perfect balance between realism and arcade. The game was never meant to be a sim and for the most part the physics for the vehicles are arcade like. Each vehicle has its own physics model and armour. For instance, the tanks are very light armoured in the back while the front is heavily armoured. The Tiger is much slower than the Sherman, but has a ton more armour and firepower.

PCPP: What levels of functionality have you built into the characters people control (beyond the basics like running jumping etc)?

Ken Balthaser: Well the big one is the vehicles - not only do you run around on foot but now you have different functionality for every vehicle you take control over. On foot we have all the standard FPS controls (run, jump crouch, fire etc) but we've also added a couple others such as prone and 'zoom' for all weapons. The user can also bail out of planes or jump off of high roofs and parachute down (while shooting).

PCPP: How will dialogue and communication be managed in the single player game (talking to other computer controlled characters), and the multiplayer game?

Ken Balthaser: The dialog is driven through the function keys for specific commands both in single player and multiplayer. The radio commands are very helpful in MP for teamwork and informing players where the battles are raging. In single player, a few of the radio commands work with the bots, such as bail out (allowing you to take control of the AI's vehicle). PCPP: Will there be any strategic command of co-operative games (a central commander)? Was this something you looked at?

Ken Balthaser: This was discussed early in the development but unfortunately you'll have to wait for BF1942:2. PCPP: Will any secret or special weapons be available - eg V2 rockets?

Ken Balthaser: We are in the middle of planning out some special weapons for future versions, add-on packs etc. we'll let you know as we lock them in place. PCPP: What have the community who has been testing the game most enjoyed about it?

Ken Balthaser: I think it's the new gaming experience we offer. The planes are a big hit - it's real hard to find a flight sometimes. (Tell me about it - deep ed)

PCPP: What areas have the community been most concerned about?

Ken Balthaser: Net performance and hit detection - which we are working on for a patch.

PCPP: How have you factored in individual performance specifications for each of the tanks, aircraft and other vehicles?

Ken Balthaser: Dice spent much of the development time tuning and tweaking the individual vehicles so they performed close to how the real life vehicles performed. Of course being an arcade action game we had to balance and tune physics, speed, armour in favor of creating a fun game experience.

PCPP: Will players at some stage be able to use their own skins or troop insignia?

Ken Balthaser: Not currently. We discussed this in depth and being a teen game I didn't want to expose younger gamers to all the X rated tags you see in many other games.

PCPP: What sorts of mods will be possible?

Ken Balthaser: I don't have any details on this, but we are in heavy discussions now about how to handle modding and releasing mod tools to the community. We expect to have more detailed information on this in the next couple weeks.

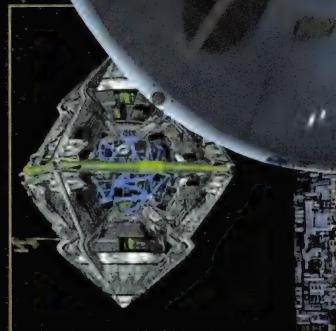
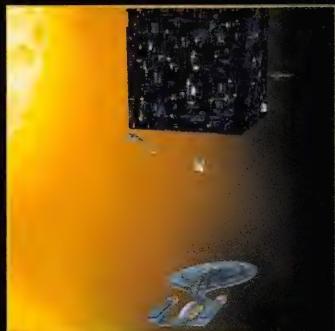
PCPP: What sort of editor will be available for the game (if any)?

Ken Balthaser: We are working on documents for the map editor now. We will most likely release it in the next month or 2.



STARFLEET COMMAND III INTERVIEW WITH DAN HAGERTY: //PRODUCER_SFC 3

The Starfleet Command series of games, for those that understand it, remains a masterful realisation of Star Trek style tactical space combat. With the third incarnation nearing release and the promise of a much more refined and polished game, armchair admirals like **Jere Lawrence** once again get the chance to save the galaxy or alternatively to assimilate it all. Resistance is futile.



JL: We learnt at E3 that SFC3 will be using next-gen ships. How will the ships perform and act differently when compared to SFCI and II.

DH: Ships from The Next Generation series are generally larger and more modern than Original Star Trek ships. However, fans of SFC 2 will find that the same tactics they had available to them are here as well - shuttles, mines, away teams, tractor beams and a wide variety of weapons. Ship customization adds an element of surprise to the mix, in that players can improve the manoeuvrability and weapons load out on their ships. With ship customization, you encounter a wider variety of enemies in the game that may look the same but have vastly different configurations.

JL: What are some new features of SFCIII that fans of the series can expect?

DH: They will see longer, more in-depth single player story campaigns, complete with professional voice overs, multiple objectives and compelling storylines. They can customize their ships to match their playing style as well as recruit new officers and watch them grow and gain new skills. Lastly, the SFC3 interface has been streamlined to make it easier than ever to control your ship.

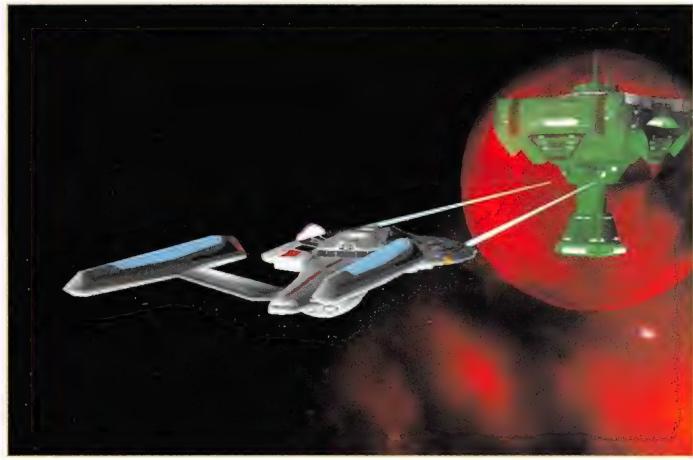
JL: What are some new graphical features of SFCIII?

DH: Our graphics engine has been completely overhauled. Every object in the game, from planets and asteroids to ships and starbases use much more detailed textures and models than previous SFCs. We've added specularity to simulate the reflection of starlight on ship hulls, 3D textures to simulate the glow of engines and a location-based damage system that reveals damage at the point of impact on your hull. Severely damaged ships will vent plasma, throw off particles and sparks and reveal charred, blackened bits on their hull where torpedoes and phasers registered damage.

Additional lighting effects and texture passes make for the best-looking SFC ever!

JL: There has been a lot of talk about ship customisation in SFCIII. Can players customise the weapons of their ship along with engines and other such upgrades?

DH: Players can customize nearly every aspect of their ship. They can add or upgrade weapons, shields, sensors, armour,



transporters, cloaking device, warp core and impulse engines.

Whereas Previously in SFC2 players could only choose pre-configured ships, we now give people several different ship types (called "hulls") to choose from with the ability to customize to their heart's content. Each hull has mass limitations, which players must work within, that provide a balancing mechanism. The fun of ship customization is in the choices you get to make - do I outfit my mid-sized ship with several fast-firing-but-low-damage phasers, or give it two powerful cannons? Disruptors or torpedoes? Players who have always had an opinion about what weapons a particular ship should have can finally test their theories in our game and explore new options.

JL: What about ships officers? Will they play more of a role in SFCIII and will they be able to gain in skill. What sort of skills will they be able to gain and will it make a difference. DH: Officers who appeared in SFC1 but not SFC2 will return for SFC3 to add an "RPG" element to the game. Your ship has six officers that each occupies a station such as tactical, security, navigation, engineering, medical and operations. Throughout the game officers gain experience and improve their skills which directly impacts the way your ship functions. Tactical officers affect how well the ship acquires targets as well as accuracy and damage. It's really noticeable what a difference it makes having a highly skilled tactical officer versus a "green" one. There are even bonuses for "legendary" officers such as being able to fire a "spread" of torpedoes or perform engineering miracles. Some examples of skills are: security officers govern the effectiveness of away teams; engineering officer increases repair crew efficiency and shield recharging; operations officer improves sensors and

scanning devices; navigation officer allows for special maneuvers and the medical officer helps keep the others alive because once they die in battle, they're gone for good.

JL: Will SFCIII have more refined missions or a more accessible mission structure than the first two games?

DH: The single player campaigns are one of the best things about SFC3. Players will have 3 campaigns to play, each between 12 and 17 missions in length. The missions will have recurring characters, story elements and some will not only have multiple objectives but multiple ways of solving the main objectives. Patrick Stewart is providing the voice overs for Jean-Luc Picard, who features not only in the Federation campaign but in the Klingon campaign as well. Each campaign is complete in and of itself, in the sense that it has a beginning, middle and end, and features objectives and scenarios that match the particular faction you play, be it Klingon, Federation or Romulan. The campaigns, however, are meant to play in order, and all three factors into a larger "umbrella" story arc that is quite compelling.

JL: Will SFCIII feature planets and nebulas and other type of galactic phenomena that players can use for greater stealth or tactical positioning, ala ST2: The Wrath of Khan Mutarau Nebula?

DH: Yes. We have planets, massive suns, asteroids, black holes and nebulae you can fly in and out of, as well as map-sized nebulae that affect your targeting and sensors. Flying a mission in an asteroid field challenges even the best players, and can be a great way to shake your opponents off of your tail. Huge stellar coronas, planets with atmospheres and animating, 3D volumetric nebulae that you can fly in and around make for starfields that are more detailed and beautiful than in any previous SFC game.

JL: How epic will the battles be in SFCIII - With the inclusion of the Borg can we expect huge Wolf 359 style battles or will players still be subjected to 3 vs 3?

DH: No, not at all, the single player campaigns have some pretty massive battles in them with more than a dozen ships involved in spectacular firefights. They can even be a bit overwhelming.

JL: What are the races available to players in the game? More importantly for multiplay, is balance a priority to stop player "gravitation" to the Borg?

DH: Balance has always been priority to us and especially when dealing with an uncommonly powerful enemy like the Borg. We have spent months play-testing the game to insure that each race (Federation, Klingons, Romulans and Borg) have unique advantages and strategies at their disposal with no one race more or less powerful than the other. The Borg are formidable opponents but so are the other three races. The race people choose will come down to their own individual style and whether they prefer frontal assaults, stealth and subterfuge, brute strength or well-rounded ships to command.

JL: What will the multiplayer support for SFC3 be like? Will there be large maps where many players can go at it? What is the maximum number of players that can join a multiplayer game?

DH: For starters, we've dumped mplayer in favour of Gamespy Arcade. There are five game modes, from free-for-all battles to team-based games and even Battlefest, which is a survival-of-the-fittest endurance test that pits players against each other in successively better ships.

The new Dynaverse 3 persistent universe multiplayer component is quite exciting. Players join servers and navigate a huge map of space that's divided into hexes, each representing a sector. Most of the sectors are owned by one of the four

main races of the game, with some hexes representing a "contested sector" - the neutral zones that separate each empire's home territories. We're targeting a maximum number of 128 players per server where players will encounter hundreds of AI-controlled ships, each flying around with their own set of orders. Players and the AI can engage in combat by flying into sectors occupied by enemies and attacking. Mission types vary and you can attack or defend starbases, planets, convoys and patrols with the result of the battles determining sector ownership. Ultimately each race is vying for dominance of the galaxy, as ownership of hexes translates to more economic power allowing for better ships to choose from. Best of all, the world is persistent and players can expect the balance of power to have shifted each time they log in.

JL: What do you consider to be the biggest improvement to SFCIII over its predecessors? What aspect of the game excites the dev team the most?

DH: Although I very much like ship customization, and can easily get "lost" in that feature for long spells of time, I think the single player campaign is really standing out as the most improved feature of SFC3 as the compelling storyline is worthy of some of the best Star Trek episodes.

Others on the team are excited about the Dynaverse 3 highly advanced AI goal system that governs when and where they will engage in combat and even when they seek out a safe harbour to repair and resupply. Ship customization and the officer feature add entirely new levels to gameplay and our interface is winning new fans as it makes SFC3 easier than ever to play. We've succeeded in retaining the deep, tactically-rich combat experience of the previous SFCs and making it easier and more intuitive to control your ship and your fleet.

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One Ring to bring them all and in the darkness bind them*

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IN REVIEW

The most authoritative reviews around

Twitch online gamers rejoice, for this is the month that the big online titles have finally made their way to store shelves. Both Battlefield 1942 and Unreal Tournament 2003 have squared off against each other and it will be very interesting to see which one remains standing when the dust settles. Possibly the best way to assess the potential popularity of an online game would be in observing the server population, particularly in peak times.

Unreal Tournament started well and with the release of the demo not so long ago Wireplay/GameArena in their wisdom set up five servers. At first it all looked very promising and at the weekend of the demo launch, UT2003 saw packed servers with a considerable wait to get on. By the next weekend however, things were looking grim. Of the five combined servers the only one generating any real element of interest was the Deathmatch server, but even that was only averaging 12/16 players. Of course it's too early to pass judgement now and the sudden lack of interest could be caused simply by the fact that the UT2003 demo only features two Deathmatch levels. Still, this doesn't explain the empty CTF or Bombing run servers.

Contrast this to Battlefield 1942, for which thankfully the klutzies at Wireplay/GameArena actually had the sense to turn off team damage, and it all seems a little awry. Of the two BF1942 servers that allowed for 24 players each, every night, without fail, they would be completely full with a half hour wait time just to get on. Spelling potentially more doom for UT2003, at the launch of BF1942, the two demo servers became release servers and were instantly full. Fast forward a week later and there were now seven servers that can still be difficult to get on to. Of course it can be argued that a full assessment of the online popularity of both games can't be reached until UT2003 is released but considering that the BF1942 multiplayer only featured one solitary level, it seems easy to conclude which one gamers preferred. As for my opinion, well, you will just have to read both reviews to find out.

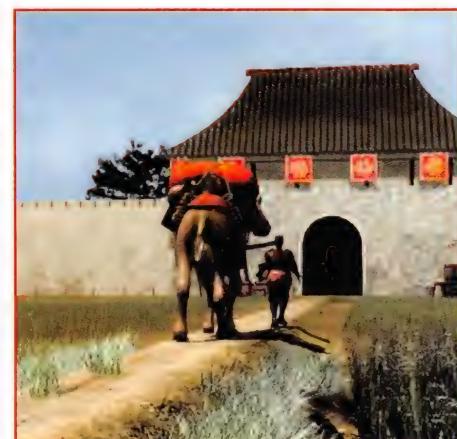
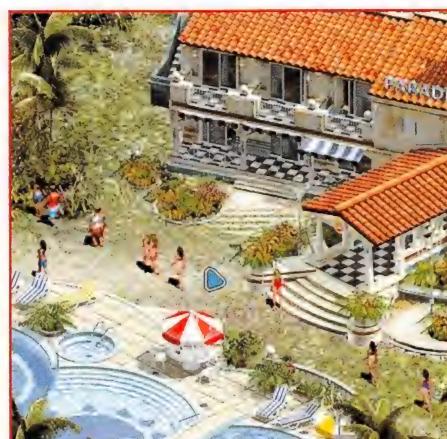
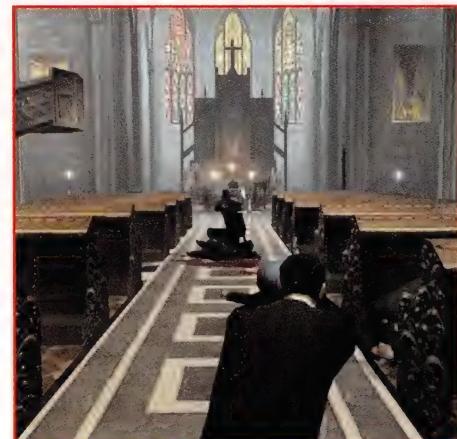
It's not all about online gaming though and this month we still feature plenty of single player titles to get excited about. Mafia delivers some truly amazing visuals and deftly explains why crime doesn't pay. Beach Life brings some titillation into the world of our digital friends (and Steve Polak) but let's just hope "The Sims" don't catch wind of it and desert their respective owners in search of sun and sin.

As always, there are plenty of reviews for you to broaden your horizons on but I just wanted to use the remaining paragraph to thank our superb contributors for all their hard work and effort this month. Thanks guys, you're one talented bunch!

Jere Lawrence
Deputy Editor
jrel@next.com.au



- 062** UT 2003
068 Battlefield 1942
074 Mafia
078 Beach Life
080 ROTMK
082 Tsunami 2265
083 Madden NFL 2003



THE PCPP REVIEW RATINGS SYSTEM



90+

89-80

79-60

59-40

39-0

Gold Award. A classic, everyone will love this game.

A strong title that's hard to fault. But perhaps not the best in its field.

Competent and playable. For fans of the genre.

Decidedly average, probably boring.

A dog. Bad, shamelessly unoriginal, cheap and horrible. Avoid.

Need

The minimum requirements to get the game running at a playable speed.

Want

The ideal system requirements for the game.

For

The major reasons why you'll like the reviewed game.

Against

The major reasons why you won't.

DETAILS

DEVELOPER	Digital Extremes
PUBLISHER	ATARI
DISTRIBUTOR	Game Nation
PRICE	\$89.95
RATING	MA15+
AVAILABLE	Now

SYSTEM

NEED
PIII600
256MB RAM
16MB Videocard
3GB HDD

WANT
P4B 2.5Ghz / AMD Athlon XP 1700+
512MB RAM
128MB Videocard
3GB HDD

BIG RIG REQUIRED

According to Epic, the bare minimum of requirements is any kind of 600MHz CPU which can handle about 16 players with decent performance at 640x480 settings to low. Says Epic, "Performance changes with level complexity and other machine speed factors, so your mileage may vary. Performance degrades as the number of players grows. If you're running multiple servers simultaneously, Windows XP/NT/2K outperforms Windows 9x due to its superior multitasking and TCP/IP processing capabilities". Adds Pancho Eekels, lead designer of UT2003 and creator of the famous CTF-Lavagiant map, "To get the most out of the game, with a minimum budget in mind, I would personally get a 1.4Mhz Pentium 4 or Athlon with a Geforce4 Ti 4200 or better. Make sure it says "Ti" and not "MX," as there is a big difference in performance between the two."



Unreal Tournament 2003

Let's frag again, like we did last summer....

The primary thought to manifest itself in ones mind upon first seeing Unreal Tournament 2003 (UT2003) in action is that it doesn't necessarily offer any great revolution in gaming, but rather, represents a major refinement to the "Arena style, portal engine based, kill everything that moves" genre of game. For those that are uncertain as to what this is, UT2003 represents a growing trend where gameplay isn't centred around linearly progressing through a level and being offered snippets of an overall story, but rather, letting the player loose in a level with a series of computer controlled AI opponents (called bots) that they can "OwnXor" to their hearts content!

Old Skool analogy

In this respect, the free-form, script-free, non-linear gaming methodology of the classics is indeed coming back in vogue. If you consider for a moment, Pacman or Mr Do, it's possible to see the correlation. Both classic games involved navigating a predefined level, avoiding the bad guys and using power-ups to turn the tables. In UT2003, you traverse a predefined level, albeit in 3D, use an assortment

of weapons to kill the bad guys and can pick up power-ups to give you an even greater advantage. Sure, as analogies go it's a slight stretch, but still, the similarities are there.

This is a good thing though because as a genre, with its own fan base, we don't have to worry about "suit" foolishness. As you've most likely already learnt from our Unreal 2 preview, it was originally planned that Unreal 2 would be the single player game and UT2003 would offer the multiplayer component. This has since changed with UT2003 now being marketed towards Arena gamers while U2's multiplayer component will be something different again.

Slowing it all down

An aspect of UT2003 that becomes immediately apparent to players familiar with the franchise is that the whole game has been slowed down somewhat - which is a good thing. It seems almost farcical that developers haven't thought of this sooner because it definitely evens out the game a lot more, especially for those without fast connections. Not at all sluggish, there are two new factors to consider in combat.

Firstly, you move slightly slower and powerful weapons such as the rocket launcher have rockets that move a lot slower as well. Also slowed down is how much damage you take and adding to UT2003's tighter game is that the player models are all very large and present a much larger target to hit. To supplement this, some old UT movement functions return, namely the double tap. The one fast element of UT2003, the double tap allows you to perform a very fast, very quick dodge. The move is performed by simply hitting the strafe or jump keys twice quickly. If you want to make a fast dodge left, say perhaps to dodge a rocket, you need only double tap the strafe left key. It's also possible to double jump your way to higher elevations. Unlike Quake III where a

long battle lasts about 5 seconds, it's actually possible to have a good 30 second slugfest in UT2003. To reiterate, this isn't bad in any way at all - if anything, the game has become a lot more appealing to tactical and more devious players. Twitch gamers might actually find themselves under threat to the more cerebral player.

Game types

UT2003 offers a single player campaign as well as the all important online component. On offer are at least five different types of game. These consist of: Deathmatch; Team Deathmatch; Domination 2.0(Capture and Hold); Capture the Flag and Bombing Run.

Deathmatch is the usual affair of run and gun killing. Just in case there's one person out there that doesn't know, a Deathmatch is a game type where it's you versus everyone else in the level. Points are awarded for each successful kill you get and the first to reach a predetermined score, or the player with the highest score at the end of a server set time limit is the winner.

Team Deathmatch is the same as Deathmatch except that players are evenly split into two teams. This makes for more tactical; squad based fighting where the level of covering fire and backup from your team is a significant contributing factor as to who the winner will be.

Domination 2.0 (Capture and hold) is an entertaining game style where players join a team and help their side in gaining points through the capturing and holding of key locations on the

map. This makes for exciting assault style matches where numerous players from your team attempt to capture a point (through the touching of a switch) whilst the defending team will take up position to ensure that the attacking side doesn't succeed.

Another definition included for completeness is Capture the Flag. This is the style that really ushered in team play to the online crowd. The premise is simple, you have to run into the enemy's base, grab their flag, and then return it to your flag back at your base. Making for some totally adrenal play styles pulling off a successful "cap", having evaded the hordes of defenders on the way is an awesome feeling.

A particularly nice weapon for capture the flag maps is the return of "the redeemer" a nuclear type device



MUTATORS

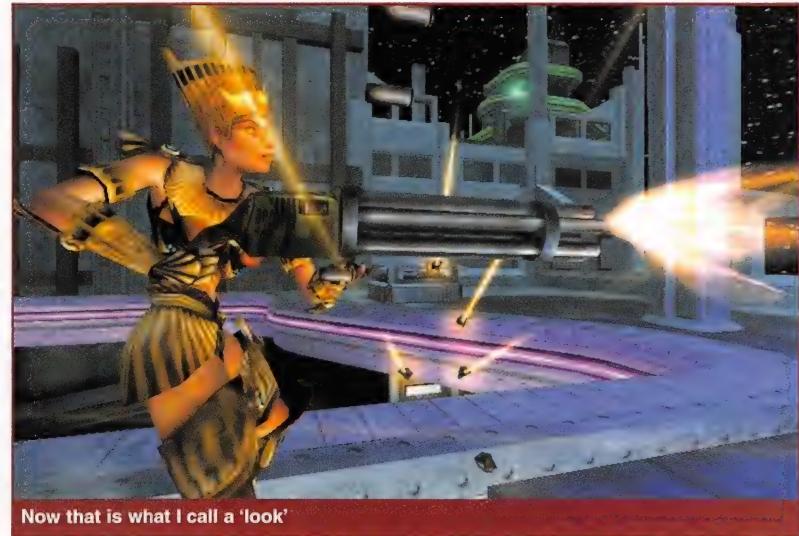
Making their return to UT2003 are Mutators which allow for servers to be run with differing physics or different rule sets. Mutators are an excellent idea that bring a considerable amount of variety to the play experience but are unfortunately flawed. On the build we saw, the problem was that the Mutators couldn't be voted into the game. This means that in order to use them, you must run a dedicated server with the selected mutations. Hopefully this will be addressed by a patch later on. More than one of the Mutators can be used at a time and an effective combo we recommend is quad jump and low gravity. With all the Y-axis air it makes for a totally different game.



Sci-fi death arenas are never about love and sharing, are they?



He's just compensating for someting else



Now that is what I call a 'look'

WEAPONS

Redeemer: A nuclear device with a 1 shot use. Primary = launch nuke; Secondary = Self guided (fly by wire)



Ion Painter: The Ion painter is a remote targeting device for an orbital laser. Primary = target orbital laser, secondary = telescopic sight



Lightning Gun: Essentially Rail gun / sniper rifle. Primary = fire, secondary = telescopic sight (zoom in)



Rocket Launcher: The Ubiquitous Rocket Launcher. Primary fire = 1 rocket; Secondary fire = 1-3 rockets (based on how long you hold down secondary fire for)



Flak Cannon: Fires ionized fletchettes at target. Primary = Bouncing flak spray; Secondary = Fragmentation grenade



Minigun: Fast firing projectile weapon. Primary = Fast erratic fire; Secondary = slower more aimed fire.



Bio Rifle: Launches bio sludge that sits on ground for a time then explodes to do AE damage. Primary = Fast firing small particles. Secondary = Hold down for 1 large glob.



Link Gun: Plasma Gun. Primary fire = Plasma bolts, Secondary = Plasma stream.



Shock Rifle: Primary mode = Photon beam (like a rail gun); secondary = Slow moving plasma cloud. Tertiary - Fire the plasma cloud then hit it with the plasma beam for a large explosion.



Assault Rifle: Standard projectile weapon. Primary = moderate armour piercing bullets; secondary = grenade launcher



Shield Gun: Handy when taking cover. Primary = close range (gauntlet) attack. Secondary = Shield.



Translocator: Allows you to teleport to a launched beacon. Primary fire = launch beacon; Secondary = translocate. Hint, fire beacon at enemies feet and translocate to telefrag them.



Folk dancing as a means of conquering entire galaxies

hang around the flag to defend it. Quite awesome, it can easily clear a room of players foolish enough to stay in the vicinity; which is a nice touch to keep the game moving.

Curiously, the assault maps from the original UT are no more. They have instead been replaced with a new game called Bombing Run. Like a violent version of basketball, Bombing Run has a "ball" type object that has to be collected and then launched into the opposition's

goals. What makes this particularly challenging though is that when in possession, you can't fire any weapons. This has made for some excellent strategies online, such as passing the ball to your opponent to inhibit his ability to shoot back. Passing also plays a special role, and like some kind of futuristic sport, it's not uncommon to observe players passing the ball around the team and the opposition dashing through to look for an intercept. It's virtually a whole game in its own right and will no doubt be a popular server that gamers will scrabble to get on to.

Single Player

To reinforce the whole principle that UT2003 is more of an evolution than a revolution, the single player game is once again the process of playing through a series of matches against bots to become the Unreal Tournament champion, which indeed, is nothing new. However, the Gameplay has become more team focussed. You can

Not only do the new "intelligent" UT2003 bots prepare you for online play, but they make for a nice change from the relentless and unforgiving play style of normal bots.

now create your own team and increase their abilities to help you win the different types of matches as you progress through the game. To further the strategy of selecting the perfect team, there are 50 new highly detailed individual characters, each with their own unique base abilities and skills.

To co-ordinate your AI friends in-game, a Tribes 2-esque voice comms system has been added. There are five different orders that the bots respond to with each command initiating a change of AI routine. You can tell them to defend your base; cover you;



Unstoppable he may be, but he still has a dumb bottom

assault the enemy base; hold this position and freelance. These commands are also available in quick instant action bot games.

We've gone botty!

It's quite amazing how far bot AI has come and the level of intelligence that the UT2003 bots display is quite impressive. Deathmatch bots will elegantly circle strafe you and even exhibit "greedy" player traits. To expand upon the last statement, bots while engaged in combat can become distracted by a more powerful weapon and like a human player, will head towards it. Not only do these behavioural patterns prepare you for online play, but the greed factor makes for a nice change to the normally relentless and unforgiving play style of bots. They will even camp popular weapons, the dirty buggers!!

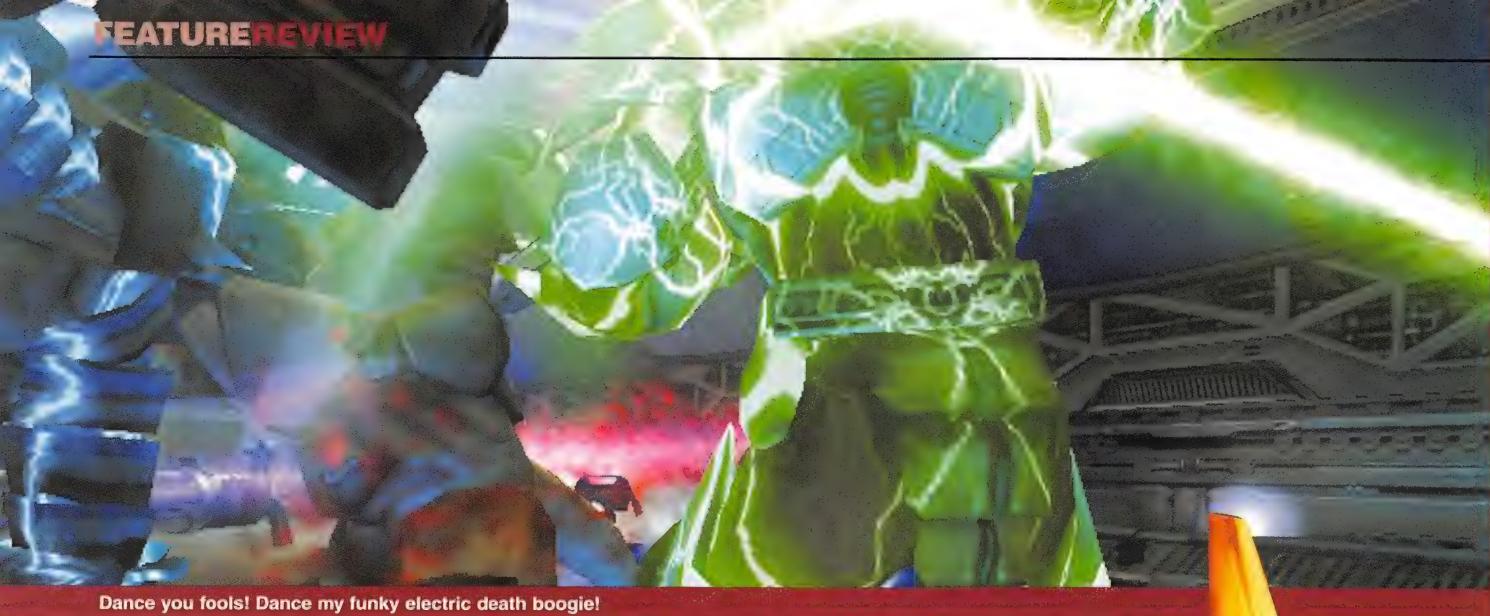
Bot team based AI is also extremely well refined and instead of being the usual impediment, bots in single player team matches are quite effective and extremely well behaved. Actually, your first few instant action team games will involve following the bots to get a feel for the level. In CTF games, the bots set out in groups and will support each other and yourself. Arriving at a door, one bot will strafe out and lay down covering fire while the other bots will rush to the next point of cover creating a type of leap frog effect. In CAH matches, the bots will strategically try and hold points and reinforce each other when necessary. Likewise in Bombing Run, the bots use different strategies and AI routines to pass the ball and although never a replacement for a competent human player they're extremely well refined and present both a formidable enemy and valued ally.

For absolute bot mayhem, it's possible to start a 64 player game with just you and the bots. If your machine can handle it (and you will need a "Big Rig" for a 64 player game), the mayhem provided is fantastic.

Especially in a more realistic 32 player match the sense of being online is definitely there. The frenetic pace, the action, the insane non stop killage, it's all fun and very fulfilling. Just like in BF1942, modem players can have just



Hang on, is this an obscure Andy Kaufman reference?



Dance you fools! Dance my funky electric death boogie!



as much fun in massive single player matches as their broadband brethren are having online.

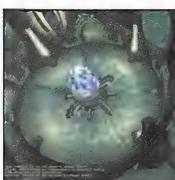
The maps

An important part of any Arena style game is of course, the maps, an aspect of UT2003 where it excels. With over 30 maps included, there's certainly a good variety of architecture for players to involve themselves in. There are two types of maps, indoor and outdoor. Some of the outdoor maps are spectacular with large towers that can only be entered through jump pads and other impressive features such as mild rolling hills. A considerable technical feat given that UT2003 uses portal engine algorithms that aren't renowned for rendering outdoor environments very well.

The indoor levels are also very good and feature a design to them that is considerably more complex than Quake III levels and exude a much more polished feel. The geometry count is high and there are plenty of railings, passageways and pipes that add considerable aesthetic appeal. Some indoor levels are simply amazing with walls that are actually part

geometry. Instead of flat textures, certain walls will consist of brick objects with a poly count. Not bump mapped, but rather more like Hardware Displacement Mapped, it's a nice precursor as to what to expect in DX9 games.

Another nice feature is one room maps where everyone goes into a room and fights it out - absolute mayhem, absolute fun. On



ADRENALINE MOVES

Bringing some nice arcadey elements into our frag fests, adrenaline is a meter that is raised with each kill and from the collection of adrenal pills off the ground. Once you have 100 adrenaline, special moves can be activated. The Super Jump is much more effective than the jump boots ever were and with the combo power-ups, flag carriers will have a whole new bunch of tricks in their arsenal to cap with.

Listed are the combos that have been found.

(F = Forward; B=Back; L=Left; R=Right)

Super Jump: (L, L, R, R)

Speed: (B, B, F, F)

Berserk: (speed boost) (F, F, F, F)

Regeneration: (B, B, B, B)

Invisibility: (F, F, R, R)





certain levels, teleporters are nice additions that can be used strategically. Due to the fact that there is a delay when teleporting, it's possible to watch someone go through then race after them and score a telefrag. In all the levels are well designed and the maps are very playable.

Graphics

Visually UT2003 is very impressive and really pushes the envelope in terms of hardware required for smooth play at 1024x768x32. Actually, any system slower than 1.5GHz will require a lowering of resolution and overall performance tweaking will need to be employed in order to play at anything above slide show speeds.

Extremely high res textures have been used in the game and as you can see from the screenshots, the level of detail is consistently good. Although not a new graphical function, but none the less effective, is liberal use of environment mapping and reflection textures. In outdoor environments, like in Halo, the surrounding landscape will

accurately reflect in the water. Other reflective materials such as metals in the level or even the cyborg player models will also reflect building and outdoor environment textures.

Sound

The sound options on offer are software emulated 3D, Direct Sound 3D and EAX covering the full spectrum of sound cards. Although A3D isn't natively supported, A3D sound card users will still be able to achieve high quality 3D accurate sound through Direct Sound 3D. Overall, sound is quite good but nowhere near the level of detail of Battlefield 1942. The distance effects in particular aren't that great and it's not that easy to discern how far away an enemy is based on their weapon sounds. 3D positional sound however is quite good and appropriately, the location of a player reflects what speaker their sound comes out of. Unfortunately though, with a lot of players in the same area the 3D spacialisation does wash out but this is forgivable as even in the real world sound waves collide and occlude, concealing their original location.

MULTIPLAY

DATA SEND RATE: 1.5KB/S | RECEIVE RATE: 2.5KB/S

Online play is extremely well placed and even on ADSL, performance wise, really feels like you're playing on a LAN. Weapons all feature splash damage or a recoil element to manipulate the arc of fire. This is nice because it takes into account latency and by spreading out the weapon spray it actually gives modem users (and those that aren't too good a shot) a real chance. Another nice feature is that weapons that require accuracy such as the Link Gun or Sniper Rifle "home in" if within say 10 pixels of the target. This means that modem users will not need to lead their target nearly as much and places less reliance on weapons that feature splash damage for the ping impaired.

According to Epic, UT2003 uses up at least 33.6 bits per second of outgoing bandwidth per player, so if you run the server on a machine connected by a 28.8K modem, you'll only be able to support one client with decent performance. In our own testing however, we found that in a 16 player game, no more than 1.5KB/s of data is sent and the receive rate is no more than 2.5KB/s. Although Epic are pessimistic/conservative in their estimates, modem users have been coping quite ably in 16 player games. 32 player games however would not be recommended, except for those on ADSL/cable.

Conclusion

UT2003 does represent an evolution in graphics and AI within the whole genre of Arena combat but to be frank, except for Bombing run, in terms of gameplay it doesn't offer a whole lot over the original Unreal Tournament. Still, there is support for a lot more bots per map and the single player game is very entertaining in that free-form way described earlier in this review. As for the big question, is UT2003 a Quake III killer? The answer is both yes and no. For those that are familiar and happy with Quake III (like a few members of this office), UT2003 doesn't offer a whole lot. For the majority of us that need new shiny things to keep our waning attention span occupied, UT2003 represents a big budget, ultra eye-candy, renewed Arena experience.

Jere Lawrence



RATING

FOR

- Excellent graphics and levels
- Stable network performance
- Well refined single player game

AGAINST

- Requires an extremely powerful machine
- Doesn't really offer anything new
- Auto taunts can get annoying

OVERALL

A playable evolution of the Arena combat genre of game but not revolutionary enough to sway the more Quake III inclined.

89



DETAILS**DEVELOPER**

Dice

PUBLISHER

Electronic Arts

DISTRIBUTOR

Electronic Arts

PRICE

\$89.95

RATING

M15+

AVAILABLE

Now

SYSTEM**NEED**

Need: P3-700
 256MB RAM
 32MB Video Card
 900MB HDD

WANT

P4-2.50Ghz/ Athlon
 XP 2200+
 512MB RAM
 GeForce4/ATI
 Radeon (128MB)
 900MB HDD

Battlefield 1942

Virtual worlds just got more real - and dangerous



BIG RIG REQUIRED... AGAIN

Everything about BF1942 is revolutionary, extraordinary, and literally places you within a fully functional Virtual Battlefield. Unfortunately there's nothing virtual about the kind of machine you will need to run this game on. The reality is that unless you have a 2GHz equivalent AMD or Intel processor and a G4Ti4200 or above then you will need to run it with reduced settings. Still, this is the game to try first and every time you get an upgrade. All screenshots are taken with all settings maxed, enjoy.

Early Monday morning; the blare of the klaxon turned the chatter of the Wake Island barracks into a creepy silence. On the horizon a Jap carrier and Battleship loomed ominously and the sound of incoming Zeroes prompted men to scurry into position.

We made our way down to the beachhead and crouched amidst the natural cover of the sand dunes. Behind us on the harder surface of the archipelago two M4 Sherman tanks took position.

The attack was swift and sudden. A volley of shells from the Battleship exploded into the sand just ahead of us and sent debris flying everywhere. Machine gun fire tore into the beachhead as numerous Daihatsu amphibious landing craft (ALC) raced towards the shore. The land battery to

our right lobbed two shells towards the foreboding carrier but it was to no avail. A Zero tore past and dropped its deadly payload right on target - the battery, and the gunner was no more. The next wave of Zeroes emerged from the clouds but ate molten flak as the anti-air gun tore through their frames sending them crashing in a ball of flame to the hard earth below.

It was then that the Jap ALCs pulled up on the beach and delivered their deadly cargo of soldiers. The M4s fired but missed by a mile. At too high an elevation their turrets were unable to swing low enough to hit the shore and distracted by the earlier Zeroes they had missed their chance. The battleship realising this weakness instantly capitalised on it and the next volley of shells to hit obliterated the two tanks and sent some poor unfortunate's burnt corpse crashing into the sand to smoulder next to me.

"Grenade!!"

I leapt away as grenades exploded everywhere. Ahead of us, waves of Japanese soldiers charged out of their ALCs and stepped around the blood soaked bodies of fallen comrades. I crouched down and unloaded my clip

into one guy. From behind, the sound of an MK1 sniper rifle cracked and ahead of me an enemy soldier dropped face first into the sand.

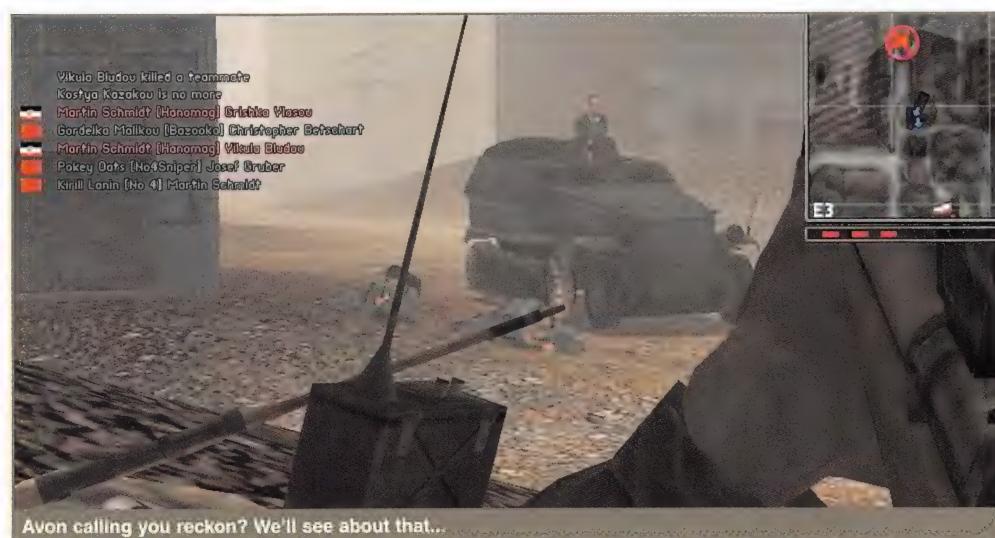
There was just too many. I depressed the trigger and released bullet after bullet until the inevitable click, click, click signalled an empty clip. An enemy, seizing his chance, rushed forward and fired three bullets into my chest. The end came quickly.

The previous text is not a story, nor is it a description of a cut scene. This was a very real battle that I experienced whilst playing BF1942 online. Yes, this game is that good! This is not a game; this is "an experience".

The way BF1942 plays will be familiar to those who are familiar with twitch online games in that it is your basic capture and hold team based game. BF1942 however is completely revolutionary in that it's the most complex implementation of a WWII style squad based tactical shooter to date.

Essentially, you're placed in the midst of a raging WWII battlefield with a series of control points that have to be captured and held. Capturing a position involves moving into the vicinity of a control point and if the





area is clear of enemies, waiting approximately 10 seconds until your side's flag is raised. At this point, other members of your team will be able to spawn at the captured point to push the battle further into enemy territory. If however there are enemies in the vicinity than it's necessary to eliminate them all before the point can be taken. This aspect of the game makes combat eerily realistic. Instead of charging around and pressing a button or bumping a flag to take control, it's necessary to scout around an area, preferably with some backup, and burst into buildings to flush out and destroy the opposition. A particularly amusing BF1942 moment when capturing a control point involved throwing a grenade through a window and watching enemies dash out to escape, only to be gunned down by a waiting squad. This game truly offers some of the most amazing virtual combat experiences to be had.

To keep the flow of the game moving along, both sides have a score that's referred to as tickets. The goal of each side is to reduce the opposition's ticket count to zero of which the two ways to achieve this are based on the type of map being played. In a head-



on map, your team needs to maintain command of more than half of the control points to reduce the opposition's ticket count. In an assault map, the team whose role it is to attack must hold every control-point otherwise they will lose tickets.

Tank Rush, I'll give you tank rush
Within BF1942 there are many authentic vehicles that can be used within each mission to further your

goals. These include: Light tanks; Heavy tanks; Artillery; Armoured Personnel Carriers; Jeeps; Fighter planes; Dive Bombers; Heavy bombers (such as the B17); Amphibious landing craft; Submarines; Destroyers; Battleships and Aircraft Carriers. Except for the single seat fighter planes, all the vehicles in BF1942 allow for the transportation of multiple players. Entering a vehicle (or a gun turret on a vehicle) takes a key-press





and once inside, you can easily change your position. This is a particularly nice feature and to cite the APC as an example, it's possible to drive to a location, change to the gunner's seat, fire away and if injured, jump into the back of the APC where unlimited healing kits replenish your health.

There just isn't enough praise that can be lavished over the developers in regard to the excellent incorporation of the vehicles in BF1942 as each one has their own unique set of physics and weapons. Likewise, the controls are equally impressive. Keeping with the pretty-much standardised W-A-S-D control methodology, utilising a vehicle is as easy as normal movement. In a tank for example, W and S allows for forward and reverse motion while A and D turns the tank left and right. The mouse is used to control the turret and the whole process is natural and intuitive. Planes take a little more skill to control effectively but still meet Dice's

goals of achieving a balance between realistic physics and arcade action.

The physics of the vehicles are also quite extraordinary and delightfully complex. Amphibious Landing Craft sway, bounce and skip across the waves and really give the impression of being on the sea. When a tank fires its main gun, the powerful blast rocks the tank back and forth and shifts it slightly back in

the sand. It's also possible to roll vehicles. Attempt to traverse a cliff face or mountain side that's too steep and your vehicle will realistically tumble down. Explosions also feature physics and it's not uncommon to see bodies fly past after a shell has detonated on their position. By far the most interesting use of physics I observed when online involved a tank gunner firing at the feet of a friend and launching him into the air so that he could deploy his parachute and attack from above. Obviously this tactic only works when friendly fire damage is off. Overall the physics are extremely well balanced and completely logical. A jeep is fast and manoeuvrable while an aircraft carrier isn't.

land from its decks.

Battleships are proving to be a popular vehicle online due to the fact that players can control their gun turrets. Ship cannons (and artillery) work in two ways. The first mode is for ship to ship battles where shells are fired a short distance. The second

This was a very real battle that I experienced while playing BF1942 online... this is not a game; this is "an experience".

mode, called indirect fire, is only available when a scout has used their binoculars to target a location. Once this is done, a new firing interface is brought up that focuses on the target for a period of 90 seconds. A waypoint is then provided so that the turret can be swung around to the correct position with elevation left for you to "guesstimate". Once you fire, the targeting camera focuses on your shell and follows its trajectory so you can get an idea of whether it's falling short or long. Extremely entertaining, this process amounts to a mini game not unlike Worms where much joy and an even greater body count is the reward for landing your payload.

The Single player experience

For the most part BF1942 was meant to be a multiplayer game like Tribes 2 or Quake 3 Arena but for those without broadband or a fast enough system to play online, the single player experience is a lot of fun and on occasion, can even be superior to that of the multiplayer game (if only because the bots are a lot more organised than

MULTIPLAYER EXPERIENCE

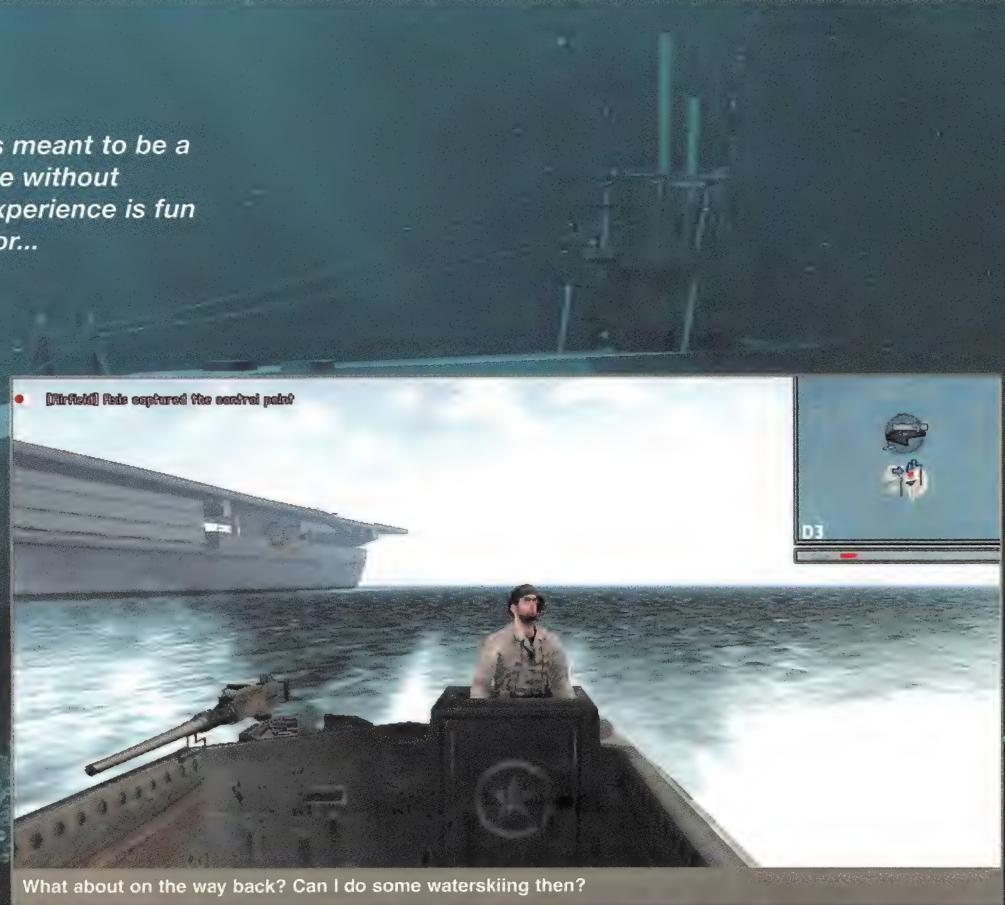
DATA SEND RATE: 3KB/S
RECEIVE RATE: 11KB/S

A quick scan through the available BF1942 servers reveals that most Australian ISPs are gearing up to launch servers that will host 24 - 32 players. This means for the most part that modem users really won't be able to enjoy BF1942 online at peak times. On a 32 player server, BF1942 sends 3KB (24kbs) per second and receives data at 11KB (88kbs) per second for a total data rate of 112Kbs. Considering that a 56K modem only has 6KB/s total available bandwidth anything above a 16 player game is going to get mighty laggy. It's not all bad though, the single player component of BF1942 is so good that it almost perfectly emulates online play anyway. For Modem users that still want to play online, try for games with 16 or less players and play to have fun, there are a lot of latency factors against you.

Hello Sailor

Massive Naval ships feature in BF1942 and are an amazing sight to behold. All the ships seem proportionally accurate and the sense of scale is so good that it's a quite foreboding experience to cruise towards an enemy Battleship. Aircraft carriers are equally impressive with planes that actually take off and

For the most part BF1942 was meant to be a multiplayer game but for those without broadband the singleplayer experience is fun and on occasion, even superior...



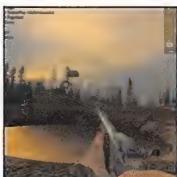
players online). Solo play offers the same number of game types as the multiplayer game, that being: Capture and Hold; Co-op (humans vs bots), Team Death Match and Capture the Flag. The reason why single player works so well is due to the fact that bot AI is quite exceptional and with 63 additional bots available per map the battles become quite spectacular. (Note: A very powerful system is required for a 64 player game).

You literally feel like you're part of a living breathing environment as the bots go about their business capturing objectives and supporting each other irrespective of your involvement. Working with the bots is an extraordinary experience and at times it's easy to forget you're not online (actually, that's not true; the bots are a lot better behaved). Interacting with them is seamless and works well. When respawning on a reinforcement cycle, especially when new to the game, it's advantageous to follow and work with them. Not only will they lay down covering fire and work hard to hold objectives, but bot-medics will heal you and bot-engineers will repair your vehicle if damaged. The only gripe that could be made against them





Join the army they said, you spend most of the time reading Asterix they said.



is that they will exit vehicles when you're in the vicinity just in case you want to drive. This can often mean that points are lost because the bots were too busy being polite and not

The sense of scale in the game is so good that it's quite a foreboding experience to cruise towards an enemy Battleship...

smacking away at the enemy. It would have been much more sensible if the developers saved CPU on this and instead used a keyboard command that forced all NPCs to exit a vehicle. If you're in main control however they will happily man guns and turrets. Minor

gripes aside, it's such a buzz to be "part of a game" rather than just traversing a linear level blasting all and sundry - there's definitely a very nicely refined "old-school"; script-free feel to

the single player experience.

Incredible Battlefields

Within BF1942 there are three main theatres of operation that the battlefields are based on. These are: The Pacific; North Africa and Eastern Europe. To the absolute credit of the developers, each theatre has its own unique geography to them at a level of

detail never seen in a computer game, ever. In the rugged desert environment of North Africa, the geography is accurately rendered with steep cliffs and narrow roads. Dramatically different is the geography of The Pacific with its lush vegetation along with, of course, the Pacific Ocean. Eastern Europe is a mix of icy snow covered battlefields, green rolling hills and burnt out, ravaged villages and cities. Each battlefield is absolutely huge and it takes approximately 15 minutes to walk from one side to the other - another reason why vehicles are important in BF1942. The geometry count within each zone is equally amazing with buildings, broken walls, foliage, bunkers, turrets, anti-air guns and roads to name a few. The level of detail in just one zone is astounding but all this comes at a price. The sad reality is that only those with "a big rig" (see boxout) will be able to play BF1942 at its fullest.

In regard to graphics, you need only look at the screenshots to garner an instant understanding as to how visually magnificent BF1942 is. There are literally thousands of textures in the game and each one is of an extraordinarily high quality. Not a single corner has been cut, something the 858MB install can testify too. Each battlefield besides being unique in geometry features an entirely unique set of textures. Even more impressive is that every aspect of each side has



AVAILABLE CLASSES

Scout: Can use binoculars to create an artillery target and carries a Sniper rifle as a primary weapon. Helmet is camouflaged for optimal stealth and cover.



Assault: Your stock standard soldier. Main weapon is a fully automatic assault rifle.



Anti-Tank: Armed with a bazooka, the Anti-Tank class can make quick work of enemy armour but isn't very effective against troops.



Medic: One of the best classes in the game, the medic carries replenishable bandages that can heal yourself and comrades. Carrying a sub machine gun that's only slightly less powerful than an assault, this is my personal pick as best all round class.



Engineer: The engineer is an explosives/demolitions expert. Can lay mines, rig explosives and repair any vehicle or turret. A mainly defensive class, all weaponry is rather weak.



been authentically recreated. Of the 6 races in BF1942 (American, British, Russian, German, French and Japanese), each weapon, uniform and vehicle is graphically unique. There's no sharing of objects in this game. Other graphical niceties include some gorgeous looking explosions with accompanying sand spray as well as wake from ships and sea spray that splashes over the sides of your ALC. Every texture in the game can also be bullet ridden whether it's on a vehicle or building. Even better is that the bullet graphic changes based on what's been hit. Shoot the hull of a plane and the bullet hole is different to the one on a building.

Sound

Thanks be to the developers because their thoroughness didn't stop at the graphics because sonically, BF1942 is equally masterful. There's full support for Hardware accelerated sound and as it uses Direct Sound 3D, A3D and EAX users alike can enjoy 3D spacialisation. All the different weapons and vehicles in the game each have their own sound effects and with enough play it actually becomes possible to recognise an enemy by the

sound of their guns or vehicles.

The 3D sound is phenomenal. Throughout each mission there's the constant, realistic sound of gunfire that gets quieter the further you are from the source. The gunfire isn't a background track either; it's the actual sounds of the battlefield. Another impressive sound feature is that if firing artillery, you will see the explosion half a second before you hear the sound to simulate the fact that sound waves are slower than light - now that's some amazing physics. Vehicles also all have their own unique sounds - American tanks squeak, Japanese tanks clang. Graphically and sonically, the attention to detail and level of scale in this game is unprecedented.

An amazing game, BF1942 literally places you within fully raging battles that are extremely involved and entertaining irrespective of whether online or single player. The graphics are amazing and set new WWII FPS standards. The physics engine is incredible, including vehicles, trajectory and even minute details such as sound that is delayed based on the distance of the effect. The Overall box says it best.

Jere Lawrence



My dad had a tank like that once, it was a bit more like a Citroen 2CV but



Like I said, I am the angel of darkness, and all planes are sinners

RATING**FOR**

- Interactive battlefield game
- Graphical and sonic detail
- Vast assortment of vehicles

AGAINST

- Bots can get stuck
- Requires an extremely powerful machine
- Uses a lot of data for network play - broadband only

OVERALL

Many correctly define video games as the merging of art and technology. Using the previous analogy, BF1942 is quite simply a masterpiece.

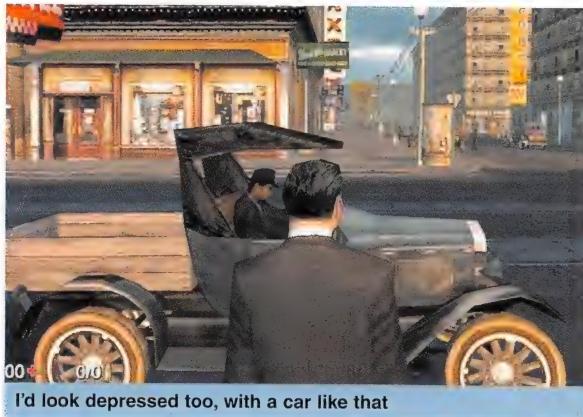
97

Mafia

Where the stereotypes are plentiful as Salmon

DETAILS

DEVELOPER	Illusion Softworks
PUBLISHER	Take2
DISTRIBUTOR	Take 2
PRICE	TBA
RATING	MA15
AVAILABLE	Now



SYSTEM

NEED	
P3-667 128MB RAM 32MB Videocard 500MB HDD	

WANT	
Athlon 1GHz+ 128MB RAM 64MB GeForce2 1GB HDD	

The movie going, TV-watching, and game-playing public seems to have an endless fascination with the Mafia. Why? Perhaps we're all intrigued by the notion that an organised criminal syndicate can still have such apparently contradictory elements of honour, loyalty, and respect at its heart. Or maybe it's just because we're fascinated by the stereotypical image of pasta-eating, red wine-drinking, short-tempered wiseguys in expensive suits who are just as likely to deliver a double tap to the head as give each other a kiss on either cheek. Whatever the reason, players will get a lesson in traditional Family values with Mafia.

Whilst Mafia bears many apparent similarities with Grand Theft Auto 3 (and comparisons are inevitable), when one looks below the surface there are many obvious and some subtler differences between the two. Mafia is set in the fictional city of Lost Heaven in the period of the 1930s, an era of Prohibition, bootlegging, and fancy dames. So, rather than Tony Soprano and The Sopranos, start thinking Al Capone and The Untouchables. Lost Heaven is a sprawling, living city that lacks the personality of GTA3's Liberty City but

makes up for it in scale. It is obviously based on cities like Chicago and New York (the districts of New Ark and Hoboken are dead giveaways) and features the usual distinctive quarters such as Chinatown and Little Italy. Although mostly confined to Lost Heaven's city limits, players will also get a taste of the surrounding bucolic countryside as Mafia takes the action far and wide.

"This is Tommy, a friend of ours..."
Mafia's story follows the exploits of a young man named Tommy Angelo, a one-time taxi driver struggling to rub two cents together to support his young family who, in true movie tradition, is drawn into a life of crime by mere happenstance. As the game unfolds, Tommy joins the Salieri family, one of Lost Heaven's two main criminal syndicates, and begins to reap the benefits of his newfound life. However, when Tommy is asked to cross an unthinkable line he comes to realise that whilst getting into the Family may have been relatively easy, getting out is a different story.

Unlike GTA's storyline, which was more light-hearted and frequently over the top, the tone in Mafia is more grim and intense. The game has many

cinema-style qualities to it, not the least being the way in which the story is presented. Mafia begins in 1938 and, after a brief narrative, adopts a reverse storytelling device and backtracks eight years to where things all started for Tommy.

Although some may find the first three missions or so are very slow to get going, and border on the uninteresting, the pacing of the storyline and how it develops is one of the game's real strengths. Mafia rewards players for their perseverance as the tempo of the game matches Tommy's progression through the ranks of the Salieri family from driver to made man. As Tommy moves up in status, the corresponding action and ensuing consequences intensify.

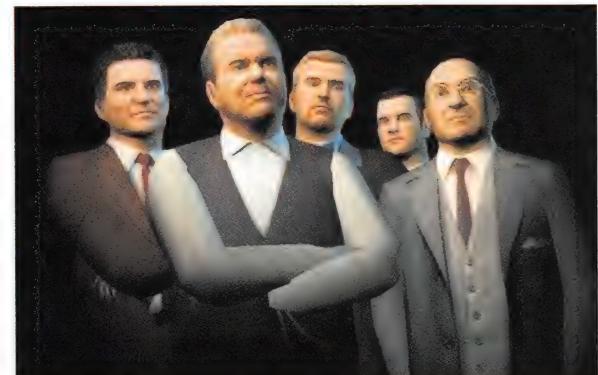
All part of the Family

Mafia's storyline is rich and completely engrossing. Plenty of writing skill is evident as this is a game which has been made to fit the story, rather than vice versa. There are approximately 50 main NPCs featured (and plenty more minor ones) each with their own interesting and distinctive personality. Mafia makes it very easy for players to immerse themselves in a completely

Mafia allows players to easily immerse themselves in a completely different era for a few hours, making them feel like they really are part of "The Family"



Ah, the old 'Phone booth in the middle of nowhere' scam



Castaway stole three hours of our lives...



...and damn it man we want them BACK!

different era for a few hours, and does an excellent job of making them feel like they are actually part of the Family, bound to its code. The good news is that all of this hasn't been achieved at the expense of the gameplay.

Like GTA3, gameplay in Mafia comprises multiple objective-based missions incorporating a mix of driving and third person action elements. There are 20 missions in total, which might make Mafia sound like a short-lived gaming experience. However, as there are multi-layered objectives within nearly every mission, the true mission total runs closer to 100. Combine this with an above average difficulty level and the lifespan increases dramatically. That said, Mafia is still a little short by modern game standards with roughly 15-20 hours on the first play through. After that, there is little incentive to go back for a second run because, like a novel, the game only features one possible ending.

More significantly, unlike GTA3, the gameplay is more linear and far less open-ended. Rather than giving players the option to pick and choose which missions to undertake and when, Mafia features a chronological set of missions which must be

completed in sequence before the next chapter in the story unfolds. Whilst Mafia does offer the opportunity to take different options and alternate routes when completing objectives (although they usually involve a choice between taking a stealthy or more direct approach), the structured gameplay will no doubt frustrate players used to a little more freedom in this age of open-ended gameplay. To placate such players, it should be pointed out that one advantage of the fixed mission regime that Mafia uses is that the integration between gameplay and story is much more solid.

The diversity of missions on offer will amaze and are so successfully incorporated into the overriding storyline that everything feels like it is happening as it should be. Players are never given reason to question why a particular mission is being undertaken or how it fits into Tommy's journey. Apart from the typical standover missions and collection of protection money from suitably meek storeowners, players will also encounter the full gamut of assassination, protection and robbery missions for a taste of life on the wrong side of the law. There are some amazing expansive action set pieces

mixed with nerve-wracking close quarters interior shootouts on offer which, combined with screaming car chases, easily throw players into the vibe of a 1930s gangster movie.

Messier than a hit in a butcher's shop

One unfortunate problem that Mafia does have is that the driving and third person action elements rarely mesh together successfully. They often feel like distinct portions of the one mission rather than parts of the whole. Initial sections of missions often require players to drive from home base (usually Salieri's Bar where Don Salieri issues orders) to a location within or outside Lost Heaven where the main action elements are to take place. The problem is that driving through the city to these locations is usually a dull affair,

SHOW ME THAT AGAIN?

Unlike GTA3, Mafia does not allow players to break into or carjack any vehicle they please. Instead, players are only able to acquire vehicles that they have been taught to break into. Usually, Salieri family's resident stuttering mechanic, Ralphie, although other NPCs will also lend some illicit advice from time to time. Rather than offering a smorgasboard of vehicles right at the start, the added incentive to acquire new cars adds to the game's lifespan. As you would expect, all the vehicles have been faithfully modelled, damage in real time, and add plenty to the 1930s feel of the game.



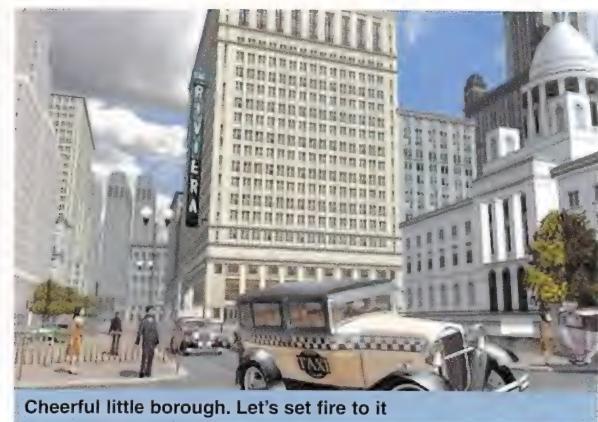
Have these criminals no SHAME?



They sure don't build 'em like this anymore



I'm alright lads, chicken always does this to me



Cheerful little borough. Let's set fire to it

causing players to wish they could reach for the fast forward button to relieve some of the monotony. It's all unnecessarily tedious and adds nothing to the gameplay. The good news is that once players actually reach the scene of mission, some full-blooded action usually takes over.

Another feature about Mafia that is unlikely to win popularity points is a limited save system. Whilst the game generally does a decent job of auto-saving games at important junctures,

there will no doubt still be much hair-pulling and promised threats of violence to the game's developers. This would not have been such an issue had Mafia not been such a challenging title already. There is a fine balance between a genuinely challenging mission and one that can only be completed via

aggravating attempt after attempt. Thankfully, Mafia comes out on the right side.

How many bullets is this gonna take?

Mafia doesn't go overboard in the weaponry department, perhaps limited by the developers' attempt to keep things as real and historically accurate as possible. There is an assortment of handguns on offer, such as the Magnum revolver and Colt pistol, although both appear to have equal stopping power with any further differences between the two often difficult to tell. More recognisable is the Thompson 1928 machinegun, or Tommy gun as it is more popularly known, and sawn-off and pump-action shotguns. Apart from these beauties, players will also have access to Molotov cocktails and of course, the ubiquitous baseball bat, part of any wiseguy's arsenal.

For a pleasant change, Mafia has left the John Woo and Matrix influences alone and thankfully doesn't adopt dual pistols, martial arts moves, and the like. The most extreme Mafia gets is allowing players to lean out of car windows to shoot at enemies whilst driving - a feature that actually proves crucial in

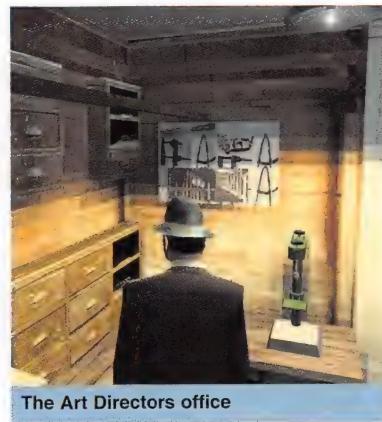
several later missions. The real issue that arises from the combat area is that the aiming cursor used during gunfire sequences is often inaccurate and requires some player adjustment to fine tune. Even more troubling is that for a game which has striven so desperately for realism, the damage model is surprisingly arcade-like and inconsistent. Although location specific damage is not utilised, single pistol shots will sometimes be enough to kill some enemies whilst in other instances emptying multiple rounds from a shotgun will sometimes not be enough.

For the third person action elements, Mafia employs a typical FPS control setup. When certain actions are possible, such as opening doors or breaking into cars, an exclamation point appears on screen. The action is then executed via a do-it-all click of the right mouse button. There are separate keys for climbing, crouching and rolling sideways to dodge, but overall, the control system is simple and intuitive. Weapons can easily be cycled through using the wheel mouse and accessing the inventory usefully pauses the game so that players aren't put at a disadvantage. The driving controls take a little more getting used to particularly if using the keyboard.

IS THIS THE SAME GAME?

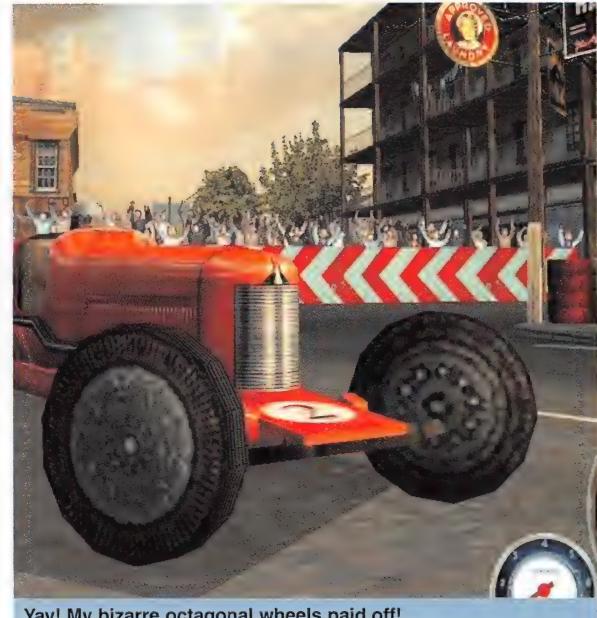
Completion of the main game unlocks a Free Ride Extreme mode (with no police presence) which offers 19 madcap driving challenges that get progressively more and more ridiculous. Completing each challenge unlocks a series of special vehicles that are sadly only driveable in the Free Ride mode. The feel of this entire mode is so at odds with the realism and dark mood of the main game that it seems totally out of place. It would ruin the surprise to detail what exactly the cartoon-style challenges are but rest assured they are worth waiting for and provide plenty of laughs.

There is a fine balance between a genuinely challenging mission and one that can only be completed via attempt after aggravating attempt...



GIVE ME MORE!

Mafia is devoid of hidden extras and bonus missions. Surprising, given that Lost Heaven is such a huge and diverse city. Although players are given some freedom to explore the city, there is virtually no incentive to do so other than to appreciate the superb living-city elements. Tossing in hidden bonuses would have added more time to a relatively short game not to mention providing a nice diversion.



For this reason, a joypad is probably the best option, although it may prove cumbersome having to constantly switch between keyboard and joypad.

Get that guy's licence and rego!

Although there are few AI issues to speak of, one of the things that will no doubt annoy the heck out of most players is the way in which other drivers in Mafia behave. The driving often looks like a clip from the ever-popular World's Worst Drivers Number 27. Even when players have the right of way, or are observing traffic rules to the letter, collisions are sometimes unavoidable or caused through no fault of the player. The result is of course that the police arrive promptly on the scene with infringement book in hand (which wastes valuable mission time) or worse, handcuffs at the ready (which effectively ends the mission). If it's a case of the latter, all of a player's hard work in a mission can often come undone just because the Artificial Intelligence, wasn't.

Mafia runs on Illusion Softworks' own LS3D engine, the same engine that will support another one of their upcoming titles, Hidden & Dangerous 2. The result is one fine looking game in every respect. All the cinematic-

quality cutscenes are rendered using the same engine which makes the transition from action to FMV seamless throughout. The action is generally smooth and there are few problems with the framerate unless there are a large number of vehicles on screen at the same time which is rare. However, there is some evidence of semi-savage pop-up in some of the driving mode sections, particularly when driving towards or across one of Lost Heaven's bridges.

There are also no camera issues to speak of, quite an accomplishment given the mix of scenarios and action. Mafia also features some excellent texturing work particularly with the lifelike character faces, although upon close inspection it's apparent that the city buildings haven't received the same level of attention. Nevertheless, the city is filled with plenty of little details that really help to convince players that it is a living city. One thing that is missing is the real-time weather effects and time lapse that worked so well in GTA3; all of Mafia's missions feature fixed environment settings.

Mafia's soundtrack is an elegant mix of blues and swing that suits the feel of the game perfectly...for a while. There just isn't enough variety and

driving around listening to the same style of music becomes repetitive before too long. Again, the developers were probably obviously restricted by the period setting. Voice acting is also a mixed bag. Whilst the main voiceover for Tommy is excellent, others sound noticeably un-Italian, or otherwise feature the worst Italian accents this side of a high school play. As the developers were obviously aiming for authenticity, it's surprising that this is such a variable area.

Players ready to dismiss Mafia as just a GTA3 period piece should think again. Whilst there are certainly similarities between the two (and some Max Payne elements thrown in as well), Mafia does plenty of things differently and does them exceptionally well to stand as a title in its own right. Whilst not without its issues, it impresses by offering challenging gameplay and a rich storyline that complement each other throughout.

George Soropos

RATING

FOR

- Deep storyline
- Diverse and challenging missions
- Realistically immersive

AGAINST

- Tedious in Parts
- Stupid AI drivers
- Little Replay Value

OVERALL

The best gangster experience you can have short of waking up next to a bloody horse head.

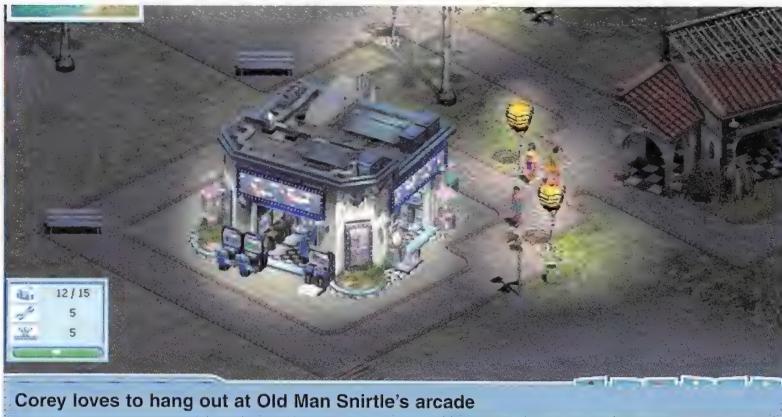
91

Beach Life

All the good stuff without sand stuck in your cossie.

DETAILS

DEVELOPER	Deep Red
PUBLISHER	Eidos
DISTRIBUTOR	Electronic Arts
PRICE	\$79.95
RATING	M15+
AVAILABLE	Now



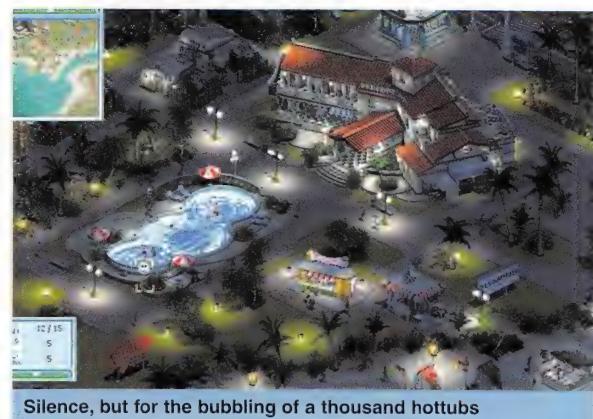
Corey loves to hang out at Old Man Snirtle's arcade



Later that day...



Sparks are flying, Corey must be on the beach



Silence, but for the bubbling of a thousand hottubs

SYSTEM

NEED	PII 450 / Athlon(r) 128 MB RAM 16MB Video card 950 MB HDD
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WANT

WANT	PIII 800 / AthlonXP 256MB RAM 32MB Video card 950MB HDD
-------------	--

Those crazy Poms! Only the English could come up with sleazy programs about drunken tourists looking for a 'shag' and getting out of their heads on lager. Not only do some of the noble English like to do it in far away islands places like Ibiza, but one company, Deep Red, has made it possible for the English, and us more demure Aussies (you are kidding! - Ed) to get into the holiday resort mood even when we are stuck at home amidst our decidedly non-tropical everyday surroundings.

Beach Life takes an in depth and sometimes irreverent look at the art of holiday resort management with you being called on to make the dreams hopes and realities of your guests come true, or at least stop these damn guests (they'd have

played this sort of game before you will find there is a lot of menu help and that most aspects of the interface are very logically designed. Clicking on a building type will reveal a sub menu screen where you can check how that building is doing, adjusting the prices, hiring staff, ordering maintenance or even changing some of the stock for sale.

You will need to do this a lot as changing your prices and getting the equation right to suit the circumstances right is a subtle art which will take some perseverance before you have it sorted.

Where the F*&%! Is Bob?

Getting things moving in just about any of the campaign scenarios, or the sandbox mode for that matter, is all about choosing the right structures to build, plonking them in the right locations and then watching the little Bob The Builder types put it all together at a seemingly glacial pace. Indeed you can quickly fall into a trap if you get carried away with your construction plans. The best approach is to hire as many builders as you can afford (up to a maximum of 8) and then let them build a small number of structures relatively quickly. Popping down lots of building plans for your chaps is a much slower

Beach Life is more frivolous fun than frustrating. Watching your guests get drunk and go in for some convivial calisthenics on the beach is certainly amusing enough.

to be Poms wouldn't they?) from sooking and whingeing all of the time!

The game has a sandbox mode, where you can go nuts and build the kind of resort you want to, as well as a more in depth campaign mode and a decent tutorial as well. If you haven't

and less efficient way of doing things so be patient and hold on to your cash at first. Only commission new building sites when you have a few on the go, and wait

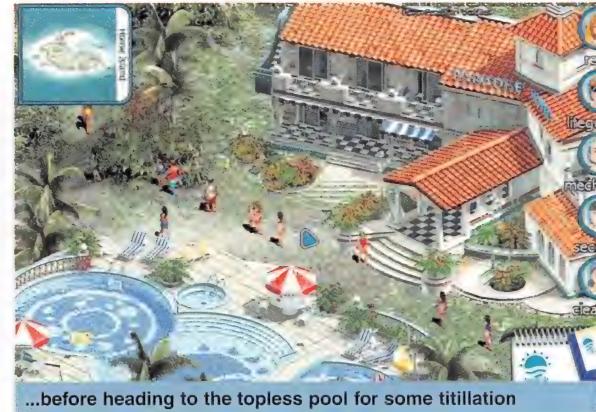
WHAT IS IN A NAME?

The guys from Deep Red have a sense of humour which permeates every line of code in this game. All of the cleaning and other ancillary staff have amusing names which ridicule their career. There is Julianne Polishit, Travis Stuftit and a host of others. These staff will usually do their jobs without too much fuss, and you can send them to areas which more urgently need their attention, although if they are on a break - forget it. They will stand around doing bugger all while all the loos overflow and a cloud of flies hover over the whole mess. You can make them a little keener by upping their salary and making sure you place their HQ closer to where they will be working is also a good idea. However at the end of the day it is hard to want to pay these folk more when their name makes a mockery of what they are trying to do for you.

In the art of holiday resort management, you are being called on to make the dreams of your guests come true, or at least stop them from sooking and whingeing all the time.



Corey drops into Roller Burger for a spot of lunch...



...before heading to the topless pool for some tillitation



She was so hot, spot fires were breaking out spontaneously!



A ferry ride? No thanks

for these to be erected before you commission more.

Having done this you will notice that your guests aren't happy anyway and will complain that there's no place they can buy suntan lotion, rest their weary feet in a hot tub or even go for a leak (haven't they heard of bushes?) Get used to the complaining because it's a stable of this game and you must learn to prioritise your efforts rather than always listen to the malcontents who should be grateful for some time off in the first place.

No fun behind the bushes.

For the most part the visual treatment is workable, even if it isn't that likely to impress anyone who knows much about the sorts of graphics a powered up PC is

capable of these days. Basically, Beach Life uses a sprite based isometric engine which is consistent with this genre of game. Not being true 3D though the map cannot be rotated on any axis and it's sometimes annoying when trying to see behind buildings you have placed. What's especially annoying is when you are trying to fit another construction in a very small space and cannot see the few shrubs and trees behind another structure that inhibit building placement. The solution to this was to frantically click the map with the bulldozer function in a vain attempt to find the offending flora. This can also be made more awkward by the fact that areas of the map on the right hand side of the landscape can also be hard to get at with the bulldozer even after you minimise the menu which is in the way.

However Beach Life is a lot more frivolous fun than it is frustrating. Watching your guests get drunk and go in for some convivial callisthenics on the beach is amusing enough. The sheer variety of

buildings on offer, coupled with the fact that some appeal to women more than men, makes for some interesting strategic challenges as you have to make sure

both the ladies and the lads are happy. Indeed proving that this is definitely a game from the UK there is even a 'Tottymeter' which keeps tabs on how both of the sexes rate each other.

Beach Life is fun to muck about with, even if the slow pace of construction is a bit annoying when you have lots to spend. The gameplay, which fits like a well worn glove for business management cognoscenti, is full of variety as each island has different strategic challenges. You might be helping deal with a shark problem or managing an overcrowded island. Or perhaps the resort suffers from pollution, too many blokes and not enough women, or maybe you need to get a couple hundred people drunk or shagging at the same time. All of these challenges will keep you busy with Beach Life.

Jere Lawrence

IBIZA RULES

Beach Life is very much inspired by the Ibiza phenomena. Not only can you build a wide variety of dance clubs in the game to entertain your guests, but the game's soundtrack and jukebox system very much emphasises this connection. Artists who contribute tracks to the game include Kinobe, Bent, and Laurent Garnier. You can even paste your own 'choons' into the audio folder and play these tracks as well. So if you want hard core death metal, say a dash of Deicide or Meshuggah then so be it.

RATING

FOR

- Good music
- A sense of humour
- Vomiting holiday makers!

AGAINST

- Dated graphics
- Slow builders
- The Olympus camera company sponsorship - sheesh!

OVERALL

"Sim Shag" - Need we say more?

80



Emperor: Rise Of The Middle Kingdom

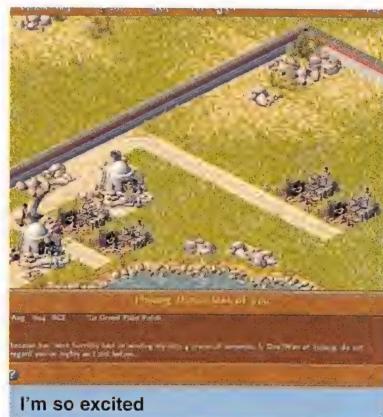
I suppose a plate of steak and chips is out of the question?

DETAILS

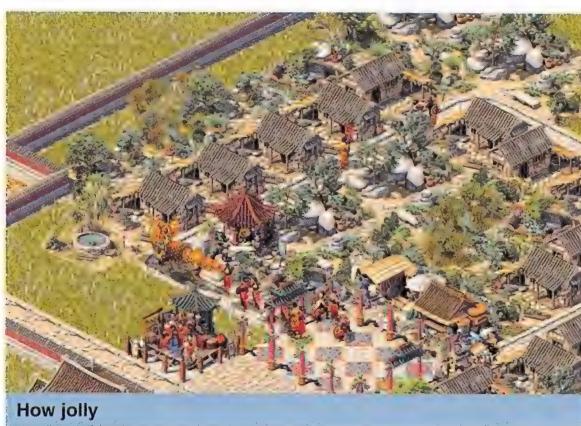
DEVELOPER	Impressions
PUBLISHER	Vivendi Universal/Sierra
DISTRIBUTOR	TBA
PRICE	\$79.95
RATING	G
AVAILABLE	Now



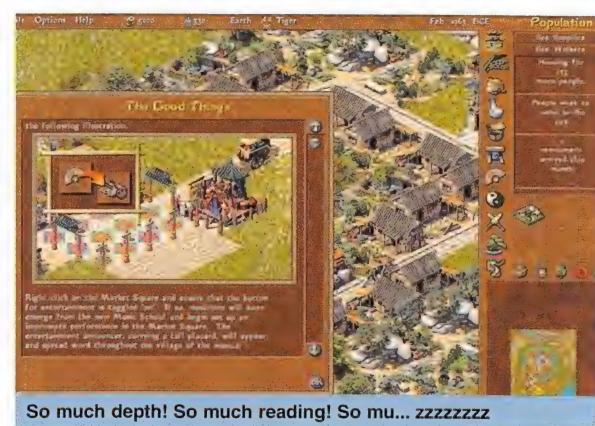
Featuring Eddie Murphy as the voice of the dragon. No wait...



I'm so excited



How jolly



So much depth! So much reading! So mu... zzzzzzzz

SYSTEM

NEED	
400 or Athlon	
64 MB RAM	
800 MB HDD	
16MB Videocard	

WANT	
P III-733 / Athlon	
XP+	
128 MB	
800MB	
32MB	

These days it seems like the more lengthy and convoluted a game's title, the more we are meant to be impressed by it as a strategy game. Games like Divided Ground: The Middle East Conflict 1948-1973 and even Star Wars: Galactic Battlegrounds: The Clone Campaigns have demanded that we take them seriously because they have titles which almost span the top of any magazine page. Emperor: Rise of The Middle Kingdom also belongs to this canon, and truth be told you'd better be in a very serious and organised mood before you even give this game a sideways glance.

EROMK, which is still obscenely long even in acronym form, is a weighty piece of code which you'd almost think you'd need to be a CPA to master. However as the Chinese say with such inscrutability 'through patience comes mastery'. Well actually the Chinese may have never said it, but they should have because patience is essential if you are to cleave the fleshy morsels of succulent strategy simulation from this game's imposing carcass. There's certainly no fast food gaming here.

You'd better be ready for the full eight-course banquet with bodily function break in the middle if you are

going to swallow all that Emperor has to offer. That said once you get into it, Emperor is the sort of game which you will be enthusiastically gnawing away on months after many other 'strategy lite' meals have been tossed in the bin (Mmmm, food puns - dep ed).

Rise of the Middle Kingdom tries with some success to span a truly gargantuan period of China's history, taking you through the management of China's cities during many dynasties. The action begins in the year 2100 BCE (which is 'before common era' for those that aren't History channel junkies) and makes its ponderous way taking you through the rise and fall of many dynasties, developing new technologies along the way until the 1200s when the Mongols are starting to make their presence felt.

Keep your people happy with hemp

The basic formula of the game revolves around painstaking city management, looking after issues like quality of food and housing, all while making sure your structures don't burn to the ground or collapse. Keeping your people happy by building shrines and entertaining them with musicians and acrobats is also par for the course. You'll need to look to military strength, develop a thriving

IT'S CONFUCING?

The incidental audio and music in this game is for the most part richly layered and adds heaps to the atmosphere. However it is a pity Impressions didn't get someone with the right skills to lay down a convincing voiceover (perhaps someone from China . . . ahem!). Having failed to do this the bloke they did use ends up sounding like he is about to tell some crappy Confucian jokes, which does spoil the otherwise serious mantle the game presents.

marketplace and oversee the growing of hemp and the fashioning of jade trinkets. There are also clay pits to dig, gardens to build and huge palaces to construct. All of the while you must oversee the economic management of your people, looking after wages, appeasing the local ancestral heroes and if you are lucky have enough for a really decent Chinese New Year bash.

Confucius say, good documentation make for happy gamers

There is a detailed tutorial which helps you get a feel for the game, and even though

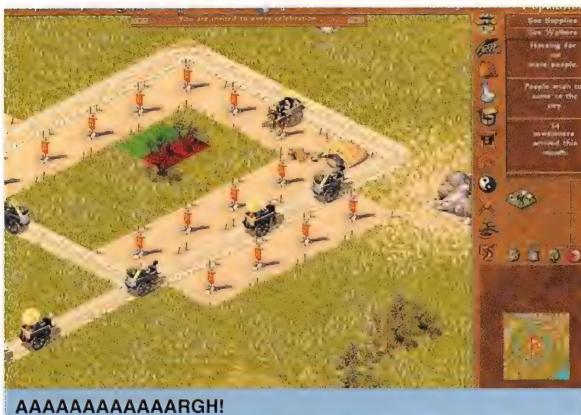
The game even demands that you order your growing city in accordance with the labyrinthine laws of Feng Shui.



I could murder a curry



The gameplay! It burns!



AAAAAAAARGH!



A Union Jack? Is it time to be marginalised by an obese foreign monarch already?

this is pretty comprehensive there is still a degree of detective work required at times. There are moments when this game can really frustrate you as your city may be suffering stunted growth because one particular commodity isn't properly making its way into your warehouses or reaching the people and you have to consult the help files or the manual for clues. This will usually have a happy outcome, but the level of detective work is at times irritating with sometimes illogical impediments for the most simple of processes. So this is where the patience part really kicks in.

However don't be disheartened as you'll hit a few times when this sort of thing happens, but you will also gradually get to grips with the game's detailed resource management system. *Rise of the Middle Kingdom* could be rightly criticised for not being obsequious, but it does yield eventually.

If you have played any of the other Impressions games (*Caesar*, *Pharaoh*, *Zeus*) you'll see similarities here. *Emperor* very much adheres to the "if it ain't broke don't fix it" school of games design. However there are also new design interface and play elements which are probably just significant enough to make the play experience different enough from older siblings.

Feng Shui gaming

The Chinese philosophy of life is something which Impressions have taken very seriously. Not only does the game embrace the necessity of several of the popular Chinese religious and philosophical traditions (Daoism, Buddhism and Confucianism), but even demands that you order your growing city in accordance with the labyrinthine laws of Feng Shui.

You might think it is pretty bloody funny, but if you want to make sure your people are happiest, and ultimately be successful in the game's at times challenging scenarios, then you'd better

IT'S TOO DAMN QUIET HERE

There is a multiplayer mode which sees you trying to defeat your mates but the multiplayer interface isn't very well thought out and the games are just too solitary for the most part. Also you will find that the games suffer because there is so much detailed city management to be undertaken that by the time you have conducted a successful raid, your economy at home will be imbalanced in some way or another.

NOT zone a residential development in an area where the karma of Feng Shui doesn't feel right. Otherwise your simulated citizens will succumb to a vague sense of ennui and decide that work is not for them and tearing the streets of your beloved domain is a much more logical option.

Zoning and organisation are very important in this game. You must keep your living areas away from the less industrial places which people need, but don't want to know about. There is a little warmongering tool, but *Red Alert* or even *Stronghold* fans will be feeling that there is too much peaceful development going on. *Emperor* is more akin to *Sim City* than its more warlike contemporaries.

Emperor isn't a bad looking game, but it isn't going to see your high tech uber-gaming machine break much of a sweat as the graphics are rudimentary yet functional. Strategy games often seem to get away with less than scintillating visuals and this is also the case here, although you can't help yourself from feeling slightly short changed by the pedestrian approach nonetheless. The intro is pleasant enough though, even if it is also largely irrelevant.

Steve Polak

RATING

FOR

- Detailed economic model
- Chinese cultural elements
- A game with Feng Shui?!

AGAINST

- Average visuals
- Obstinate yields secrets
- Very similar to many previous Impressions efforts

OVERALL

Like any hard-core strategy game you may feel like you have been here before, but that doesn't mean it isn't fun to return.

78

Tsunami 2265

A Huge Wave of Bug Infested Fashion

DETAILS

DEVELOPER

GotGame

PUBLISHER

Pro Graph

DISTRIBUTOR

TBA

PRICE

TBA

RATING

G

AVAILABLE

Now



Battle for the inner ear?



Does my bum look big in this?

SYSTEM

NEED

PII 300
128Mb RAM
1Mb HD
16X CD

WANT

PIII 600
256Mb RAM
200Mb HD
50XCD

RATING

FOR

- Runs on low end systems
- Sharp graphics
- Anime style

AGAINST

- Monotonous gameplay
- Terrible game design
- Glitchy and bug infested

OVERALL

Reminiscent of those early nineties 'on rails' CD ROM games, a travesty of modern game design. More style than substance.

30

In 2118 the Earth was straddled by a swarm of tidal waves which, as you might imagine, caused some concern amongst low lying countries and people who weren't descended from Ian Thorpe. The world's reaction to this disaster was predictable. They built giant robots! Heck, who cares about reconstructing civilisation, bugger that. Let's have some big honking giant robots.

From Point A to Point B

Essentially a first person shooter, Tsunami incorporates some exploration/infiltration missions as well. However as you play the game there is a feeling of being in a very static world where everything happens to a tight script, like those old 'on rails' CD ROM games from the early nineties. The missions are quite bland in scope and design with very basic objectives following in a straight line from one to the other. Playing Tsunami actually makes you feel more like you're at work than at play.

There are also some serious flaws in the design of the game and also the code. There is no capacity to invert the y-axis of your mouse for example, an unforgivable omission in this day and age. Missions are also too long, considering that there is no way to save the game until you've finished. Sometimes people need to stop playing for reasons of diet, hygiene and social responsibility but the developers of Tsunami think that you're going to be so devoted to their game that you'll put your life on hold until it's finished. Well, there have been a few games like that, but this certainly isn't one of them.

Easy does it

The game's collision detection and fall damage algorithms are also suspect. For example at one point the main character jumped up and down on the same spot, and died from the fall damage! It's a bit like a fighter plane that explodes without warning when



First one to start having fun loses

the wheels retract or an aircraft carrier that sinks every time it launches a plane, a highly practical and effective military solution.

Purty...

Tsunami uses cel-shaded 3D (the same technique used for Dragon's Lair 3D) so the eye candy is quite pleasant. As you can see from the grabs the character models are beautifully smooth and sharp, while the backgrounds are more typical and just straight textured. The advantage of this type of presentation is the comic book/Anime type feel it gives the game.

The audio is another story and is full of glitches. The game had to be restarted constantly to clear horrendous screeching from the buffer. There is a patch for XP/2000 users included on the disk which we foolishly assumed would fix the problem, it didn't.

There have been a few attempts at bringing Anime style giant robot action to the PC, the best of which was probably Activision's Heavy Gear series. Mostly though they are shallow, pretty efforts by non-gamers and the overall effect has been to create a stench around the concept which Tsunami will do little to alleviate.

George Soropos

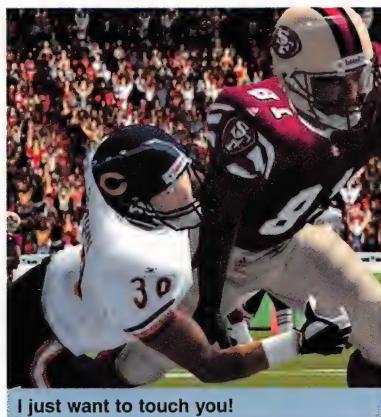


TELL ME THE TRUTH! Do these boots go with this gun?

Tsunami 2265 seems to have been developed by a bunch of Italians, a people known for their style and fashion sense. As you can see these giant robots are indeed very stylish, and possibly even fashionable, unfortunately it's a case of style over substance and as good as they look, they can't beat Heavy Gear or Mechwarrior for sheer fun.

Madden NFL 2003

Extreme Boofiness



Here's the Madden NFL 2003 review in one sentence: It's got the new 8 division, 32-team format of the 2003-2004 National Football League season - go out and get it!

Now, for all those American football fans that look beyond currency in stats and liveries for a little more depth here's a more detailed synopsis...

Evolution

Madden NFL 2003 is currently the best American football game on the market and without a doubt, is easily the most comprehensive. While the roots of the series lay in more arcade/action style play, EA Sports has successfully implemented more cerebral elements into the game with each new version. Whether you delight in the pressure of executing a play in realtime, or prefer to tackle the game from the sidelines - as coach or even owner of your own football team, Madden NFL 2003 has it covered. This version features the usual engine overhaul you'd expect, however the results are most noticeable on the PC version than its console cousins. Not surprisingly, the visuals are smarter and there are a host of new animations,

resulting in some smooth and visually stimulating gameplay.

The game engine has been overhauled and last years flawed pass defence has been fixed so expect a tighter passing game. The only real complaint here is that the running game is still unforgiving.

3rd and WTF?

Given the depth and resulting complexity of NFL at all levels, Madden's greatest and most critical challenge has been to keep the mechanics, controls and interface comprehensible to the average user. Here, Madden 2003 is a mixed bag.

Madden's gridiron introduction tutorial failed to make the cut in the PC version (although it appears in the console versions). God knows why EA has released a tutorial-free version outside of the US because coming to grips with the basic rules of American Football is only the beginning. Getting to know each of the players' positions and their specific roles, as well as all the different play scenarios is where the sport becomes progressively more interesting and rewarding.

To supplement this, M2003 features an excellent "Mini-Camps" play mode,

THE GAME - GRIDIRON

Go on, give it a chance. We know it looks utterly confusing, but if you can work past the pansy factor of the uniforms (well, the trade off is that they DO hit hard) there is much order to the chaos. Underneath all the spectacle of NFL lies a terrifically tactical game, one that is as engaging to watch as it is to play. As for the other criticism levelled at the game - the flip side to all that stopping, starting and swapping, is a game of much intensity. Even if it's because the majority of the team spend most of their time on the sidelines! For a run down of the basics of this great sport, visit www.nfl.com/basics/.

where you're given the option of practicing set plays outside of exhibition game parameters. Time invested here not only increases the appreciation of the subtleties of each position on a team, but it will also yield improved performance within the game proper.

Another simple but highly effective aide is Madden's play suggestion feature, where an appropriate play is offered during play selection. While handy for experienced players, it's sheer genius for beginners, especially when coming to grips with the sports defensive plays.

For the more experienced football freaks, the most involving and demanding play mode of M2003 is, of course, the Franchise. New to M2003 is the Pre-Season mode, where player stats can be raised prior to regular season (players can be injured here too - so watch out!). Franchise owners can also import their own team logos for helmet and home ground livery.

However, a most disappointing omission is that of creating custom plays. Why this feature is available to console gamers but not us of the PC persuasion remains a mystery. Oh how the mouse finger lays in wait for M2004...

And it's...good!

Madden NFL 2003 is a slick title indeed, providing a football and NFL lover's dream. With franchise mode and online play, there's enough here to keep all level of player busy well into the next season, and the inevitable Madden NFL 2004. Is it worth the purchase if you own M2002? Well that really depends - see the beginning of this review.

March Stepnik

DETAILS

DEVELOPER
EA Sports
PUBLISHER
EA
DISTRIBUTOR
EA
PRICE
TBA
RATING
G
AVAILABLE
Now

SYSTEM

NEED
PII 400
64MB RAM
16MB D3D Video Card
WANT
256MB RAM
32MB Video Card
Modem and ISP
for Online play

RATING

FOR
■ Visuals
■ Franchise mode
■ Online play

AGAINST
■ No custom play
■ No tutorial
■ Tough running

OVERALL

The best version of Madden yet - which is not a redundant statement given some of their questionable design decisions previously.

89

DVD MOVIE STUDIO



Panasonic

Everything you need to create DVD movies

Pinnacle Systems, a worldwide leader in digital video, and Panasonic, a leader in DVD technology, jointly announce DVD Movie Studio, a complete PC upgrade solution for making DVD movies. Using DVD Movie Studio, users can create DVDs from their home movies that can be watched on the vast majority of consumer DVD players. Pinnacle Studio 7 allows you to capture and edit footage on your PC. Add titles, scene transitions, customise sound tracks and more. Pinnacle Express then burns the material to DVD or VCD, S-VCD or back to your DV camera. The Panasonic DVD-RAM/R burner can also be used to backup PC data, copy DVD media (subject or copyright) or simply watch DVD Movies.

Capture. Edit. Burn.

- Capture movies from your DV Camcorder via the supplied firewire card
- Edit scenes, add effects & titles
- Add DVD navigation buttons & chapters
- Burn to DVD on the Panasonic DVD-RAM/R drive
- Preserve and share your memories on DVD
- write and re-write data on DVD-RAM like hard drive (100,000 times)
- DVD Utilities and Region coding software included

Features include:

- Keep your movies digital transfer from DV to PC to DVD
- Ideal for DVD movie creation or for back up of PC data (up to 9.4GB on one disk)
- Transfer video footage from your DV camcorder via the supplied Firewire card
- Edit, add soundtracks titles, effects and extra features with Pinnacle Studio 7.
- Be assured of compatibility with DVD-R. The format approved by the DVD forum.
- DVD-RAM is like a hard drive. Drag and drop files from Windows Explorer (r)
- Create Music CD's, DVD-ROM's or simply archive and back up with Primo DVD.
- Watch DVD movies with Cyberlink Power DVD (included)
- Everything to get you started in DVD creation.

The bundle includes:

- DV/ Firewire™ Interface Card
- Pinnacle Studio 7 SE
- Pinnacle Express
- Panasonic DVD-R/RAM Burner
- Cyberlink Power DVD software (VR Support)
- Veritas Primo DVD data burning software
- 1x 4.7GB DVD-R disc, 1x 4.7GB DVD-RAM disc
- IDE Cable, Firewire™ Cable, Drive Mounting Screws
- Hardware Installation Manuals
- Online software guides.
- Region coding software
- DVD diagnostic tools and drivers



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Harvey Norman

IN REVIEW HARDWARE

The perfect place for your peripheral proliferation

This month we have a huge six page write-up on ATI's latest flagship graphics processor, the Radeon 9700. Providing a significant performance increase over nVidia's current flagship product, the Ti4600, the R9700 certainly caught us by surprise.

How excited are we about this card, well, after some superlative tweaking, we managed to bench it at 15429 3D Marks - one of the fastest benchmark's this country has ever seen and fully registered and approved on the madonion.com Online Result Browser.

The current high-end desktop CPU market is much like a tennis match played by AMD and Intel. One chip manufacturer releases their latest top performing part that takes the market by storm, then as little as a month or so later the other releases their "next big thing" and the cycle continues. Of course, there are a number of fouls along the way, however, for the last year or so it has been a pretty even match up, with the performance crown shifting between the two manufacturers each month.

Speaking of CPUs, both AMD and Intel have added new products to their high-end desktop processor line, the AthlonXP 2200+ and Pentium 4 2.8GHz respectively. Providing stellar performance at a killer price, the 2200+ is just what the doctor ordered for those looking for high-end performance on a

budget. Alternatively, the Pentium 4 2.8GHz is ideal for those that will spare no cost in order to have the fastest processor on the market.

If you're going to be purchasing one of the above processors, you will obviously need a motherboard to go with it. Coincidentally, this month we take a look at two newly released motherboards, the Asus A7V8X for SocketA Athlon processors and the Abit SR7-8X for the Socket478 Pentium 4.

Are you a hardcore gamer? Is your current mouse pad letting you down? If you answered "yes" to both of those questions, then you will certainly want to take a look at our review of Everglide's latest pad range, aptly named Optical. What makes the Optical pads different from a sheet of paper or an old motherboard manual? You'll have to read the review to find out!

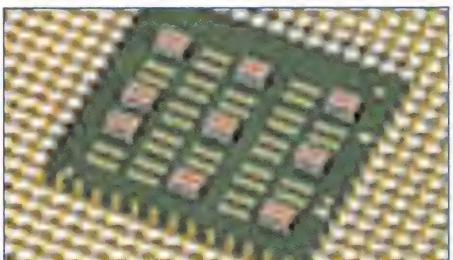
As you can see, this issue is certainly an exciting one in terms of Tech. Wow - It's simply amazing to look back at how far PCs have come since their inception. To think that no more than five years ago we were humming along on our then mind-blowingly fast DX4/100 486 computers. It's remarkable how far the PC has come, and overwhelming to think about what is in store for the future. Just imagine what the tech will be like by the time we reach 2010.

Asher Moses

Technical Writer

letters@pcpowerplay.com.au

- 086 ATI 9700
- 092 Everglide Mouse Mats
- 093 KT400
- 094 P4 2.80GHz
- AMD XP2200+
- 095 SR7 - 8X
- Thrustmaster Wheel
- 096 Klipsch Speakers
- Altech Speakers
- 098 The Beast



THE PCPP TECHNICAL AWARDS SYSTEM



The Power Award is given to the highest performing product in each PowerTest. We don't take into account the cost of the component or what extra functionality it might have. We just look for raw power.



The Value Award is given in the PowerTest each month to the product that offers the best balance between performance and cost. It also takes into account any extras that come with the product.



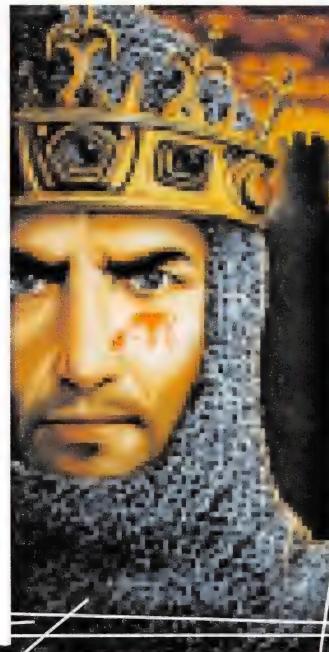
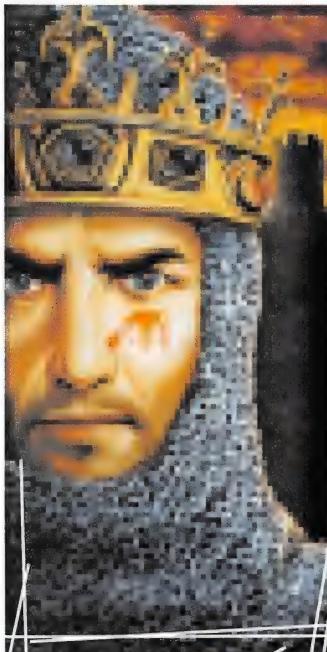
In our definitive Hotware reviews, any product deemed revolutionary, of exemplary value or simply so cool it's a must-have, will receive a score above 90% and the coveted PC PowerPlay Gold award.

THE PCPP HARDWARE RATINGS SYSTEM

90+	Excellent, Gold Award. A must buy.
80-89	Worthy product, which is hard to fault. May be slightly lacking in extra features, value or performance.
60-79	Competent product, significantly behind the State of the Art.
40-59	Mediocre with little to recommend it.
0-39	A dog. Avoid.

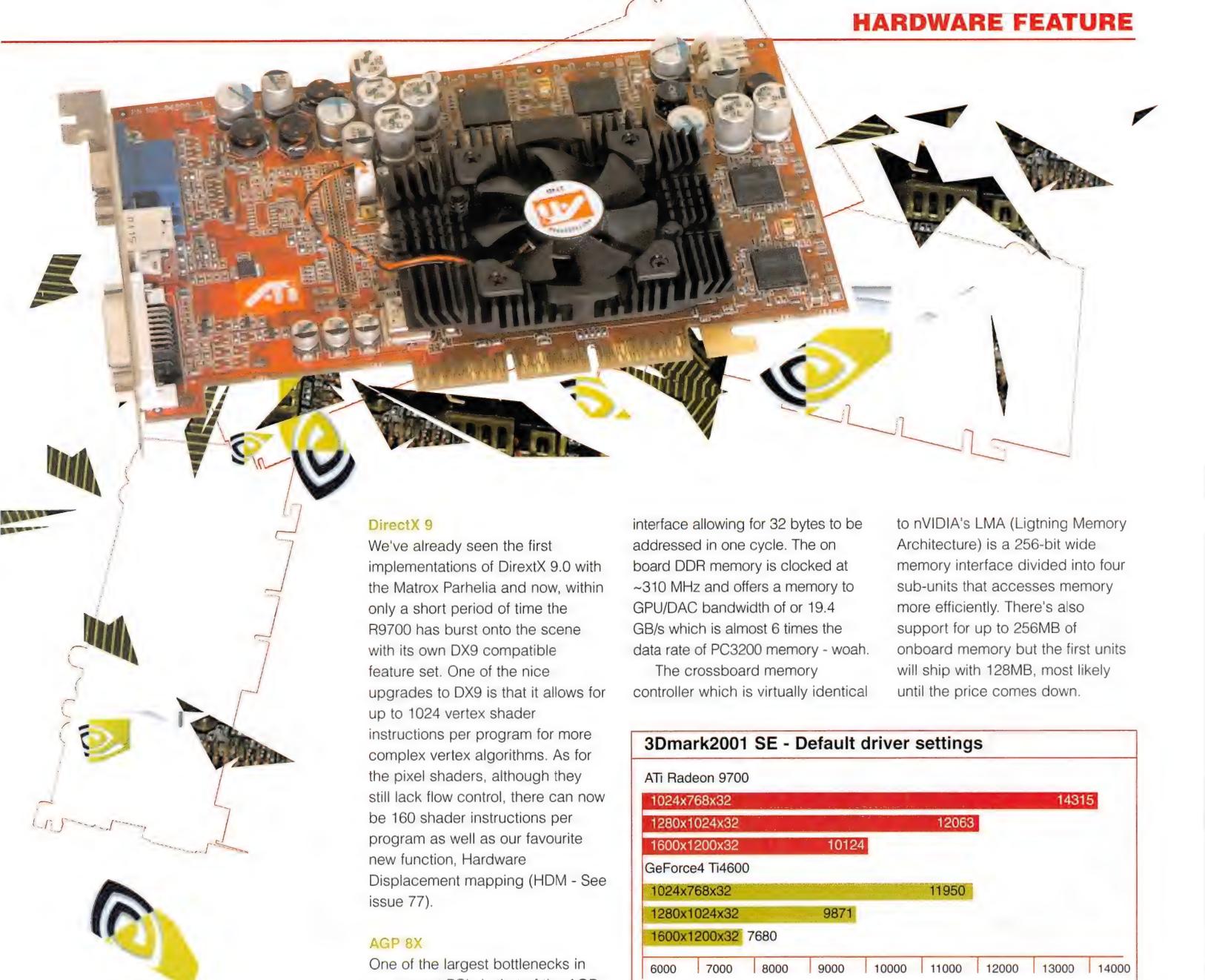
Distributor	The local point of contact for the product.
Price	The RRP at the time of going to print.
URL	Where to find further relevant information.

THE KING IS DEAD LONG LIVE THE KING



The King is dead! The King is dead! ATI's new marvel has finally reached our shores and hasn't just dethroned nVIDIA as the king of video cards but has thoroughly humiliated it. It's fast, features a brand new colour palette, is fast, is fully DX9 compatible, and oh, did we mention it was really fast? Here at the PCPP labs we haven't been this excited in a long time. **Asher Moses** and **Jere Lawrence** explain why.





DirectX 9

We've already seen the first implementations of DirectX 9.0 with the Matrox Parhelia and now, within only a short period of time the R9700 has burst onto the scene with its own DX9 compatible feature set. One of the nice upgrades to DX9 is that it allows for up to 1024 vertex shader instructions per program for more complex vertex algorithms. As for the pixel shaders, although they still lack flow control, there can now be 160 shader instructions per program as well as our favourite new function, Hardware Displacement mapping (HDM - See issue 77).

AGP 8x

One of the largest bottlenecks in our current PC's is that of the AGP bus, even at 4X speed. With a limit of only 1.056 GBs/sec (about one quarter the data rate of a P4B) a faster video bus is essential. Offering 8X AGP (which means 8 samples per clock cycle) the R9700 will be able to receive data twice as fast as a Ti4600 but only as long as you have an 8X compatible motherboard. This increase in bus bandwidth is absolutely essential because most modern games are finally using the Vertex shader to full effect (though the pixel shader remains mostly unused) and the constant stream of vertices, vertex shader instructions and textures (among many other items of data) are saturating the bus. At 2.112GBs/sec AGP8X will allow for a lot more complex geometry to be sent to the video card and even more complex vertex shader manipulations.

Memory and controller

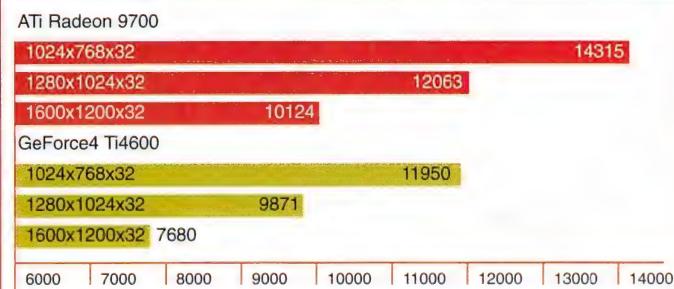
Literally a 256bit card, the R9700 features a 256bit wide memory

interface allowing for 32 bytes to be addressed in one cycle. The on board DDR memory is clocked at ~310 MHz and offers a memory to GPU/DAC bandwidth of or 19.4 GB/s which is almost 6 times the data rate of PC3200 memory - woah.

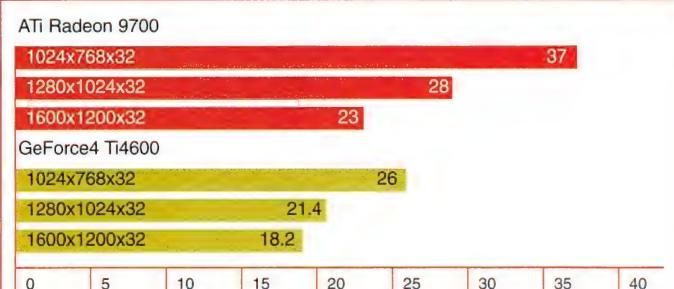
The crossboard memory controller which is virtually identical

to nVIDIA's LMA (Lightning Memory Architecture) is a 256-bit wide memory interface divided into four sub-units that accesses memory more efficiently. There's also support for up to 256MB of onboard memory but the first units will ship with 128MB, most likely until the price comes down.

3Dmark2001 SE - Default driver settings



Code Creatures - Default driver settings



CODE CREATURES



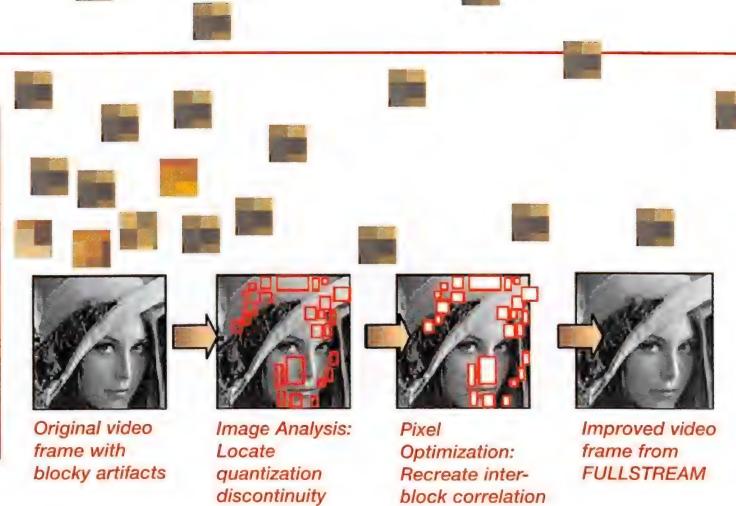
R9700 Code Creatures



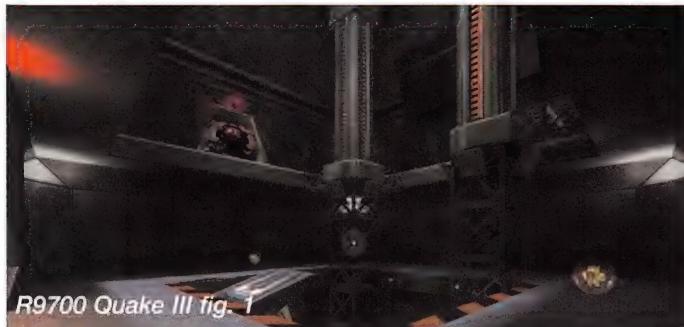
Ti4600 Code Creatures

Quake 3 Arena - High detail/Default driver settings

ATi Radeon 9700	
1024x768x32	365.8
1280x1024x32	338.7
1600x1200x32	272.9
GeForce4 Ti4600	
1024x768x32	360.8
1280x1024x32	287.4
1600x1200x32	220.3
200 220 240 260 280 300 320 340 360	



QUAKE III



R9700 Quake III fig. 1



Ti4600 Quake III fig. 1



R9700 Quake III fig. 2



Ti4600 Quake III fig. 2

Although not currently implemented, the R9700 is already configured to support DDRII (which really should be QDR - Quad Data Rate RAM). Although the early cards feature only DDR memory, DDRII will be fully incorporated once it becomes available. Quad Parallel Vertex shader Much to the distress of nVIDIA, the R9700 comes with four parallel vertex shader units that are completely Vertex Shader 2.0 compatible. Not only does the R9700 feature twice the number of Vertex Shaders of the G4 Ti's but by being VS2 compatible they're also considerably more powerful.

Hardware Displacement Mapping
One of the more exciting aspects of DX9 that we've already covered in issue 77 is that of Hardware Displacement Mapping (HDM). In a nutshell this process allows for the generation of highly detailed polygonal objects with the use of a simple 2D map. Lighter areas represent elevation, or the peaks of

the HDM and the darker areas represent lower altitudes such as valleys and troughs. Not only can HDM be used for quickly generating highly detailed outdoor maps but can also be used for advanced morphing and polygonal resolution techniques on a standard object.

Eight parallel pixel rendering pipelines

We used to be impressed by the dual pixel shaders of the nVIDIA G4 series but the 9700 with its eight parallel pixel rendering pipelines stomps all over the poor G4. All running at a clock speed of 325MHz, the eight pipelines supply a fill rate of 8*325 equalling 2600 Mpixels/s.

Quite amazingly, each pixel pipeline is totally independent of the other and each can run programs of up to 160 instructions. On top of this, each pixel shader program can perform up to 32 sampling operations on up to 16 different texture maps

and an additional 64 colour operations per pass. Using the floating point characteristics of the R9700, should the 160 instruction limit of the Pixel Shader 2 spec be too small, extraneous data can be fed into the pixel shader for another pass without losing any precision. This has the potential for some incredibly complex pixel shader effects that will be simply astounding.

Another nice function of the raw pixel shader power available to the R9700 is that it can actually clean up a video stream in real time. An MPEG1 (VCD) stream for example can be decoded through the pixel shaders to allow for a much clearer, cleaner image. Other real time effects such as blurring, embossing or outlining can also be performed on the video stream.

Smoothvision 2.0 - Full Screen Anti Aliasing

The latest version of ATI's FSAA technique, Smoothvision 2.0 promises a faster more efficient

FSAA process that according to ATI saves a significant amount of memory bandwidth which is the real bottleneck in FSAA. Another excellent feature is a fully patented gamma-correction algorithm that cleans up the FSAA process considerably by ensuring that the generated colour gradients in the FSAA procedure are displayed even more smoothly than before.

R9700 Testing - The Performance

Now that we've given you a

RenderMonkey

To allow developers to fully utilise the awesome new feature set of the R9700, ATI have made available a new 3D development tool suite that can generate vertex and pixel shader code from commonly used modelling applications. Additionally ATI have included a compiler for Renderman (a 3D tool) with a similar compiler available for Maya to be released as you read this.

COMANCHE



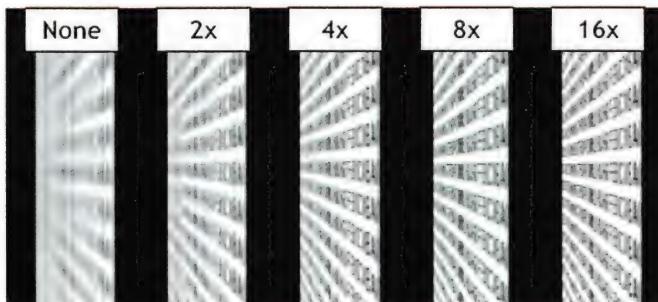
rundown on the R9700s feature-set, let's move on to the benchmarks, shall we? The R9700 was tested on one of the highest performing systems available on the market today. This consisted of an Intel Pentium 4 2.8GHz processor, an Abit SR7-8X motherboard based on the SiS648 chipset and 256MB of Corsair XMS3200 memory. To top things off, we compared the card to nVidia's current flagship product, the GeForce4 Ti4600. As far as software goes, the R9700 was equipped with the latest Catalyst 2.3 driver-set available from ATI's website and the Ti4600 was running nVidia's Detonator drivers, version 40.41. All tests were run at AGP 8x.

To get the ball rolling, we ran some Quake 3 Arena benchmarks at 1024x768, 1280x1024 and 1600x1200, with all eye-candy set to maximum. Here we saw the R9700 only slightly ahead of the Ti4600 at 1024x768, however, as the resolutions climbed, so did the gap between the two chipsets.

3DMark2001 SE on the other hand was a slightly different story, with the gap between the R9700 and Ti4600 being prominent throughout. This is largely due to 3DMark being a DirectX 8.1 benchmark, taking full advantage of the R9700s vertex and pixel shading abilities.

Coincidentally, the Unreal

ANISOTROPIC FILTERING



3Dmark2001 SE - Anisotropic Filtering 1024x768x32

ATI Radeon 9700	
None	14315
2x	12520
4x	12010
8x	11380
GeForce4 Ti4600	
None	11950
2x	9560
4x	8287
8x	7269
0000	2000
4000	6000
8000	10000
12000	14000
14000	16000

Comanche 4 - Default driver settings

ATI Radeon 9700

1024x768x32	55
1280x1024x32	54
1600x1200x32	50
GeForce4 Ti4600	
1024x768x32	53
1280x1024x32	52.3
1600x1200x32	45.2
39	41
43	45
47	49
51	53
55	

Tournament 2003 demo was released just in time for the writing of this review. Included with the demo is a handy benchmarking utility that runs through two lengthy demos and outputs an average FPS for each test. The first test, called "Flyby", is simply a fly-through of two of the game's levels, while the second test, called "Botmatch", is a deathmatch between bots. Overall, the R9700 held a comfortable lead in all tests performed, however, the Ti4600 was much more competitive in Botmatch, especially under lower resolutions.

Another DirectX 8.1 benchmark used in testing was Comanche 4. At first these results were quite strange due to the fact that performance did not differ much between each resolution and there was quite a small gap between the R9700 and Ti4600. However, after running the benchmark a number of times and investigating the issue, we have come to the conclusion that the reason for this is the fact that Comanche 4 is much more reliant on the CPU than it is on the graphics card. Although the results were quite close, the R9700 once again managed to outperform the Ti4600 overall.

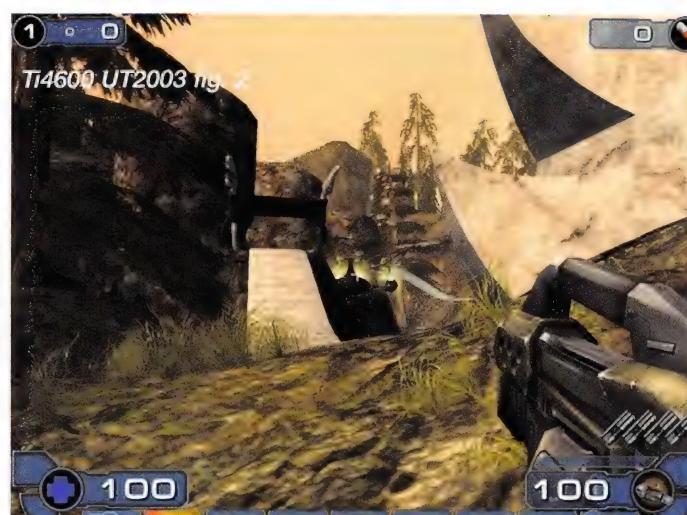
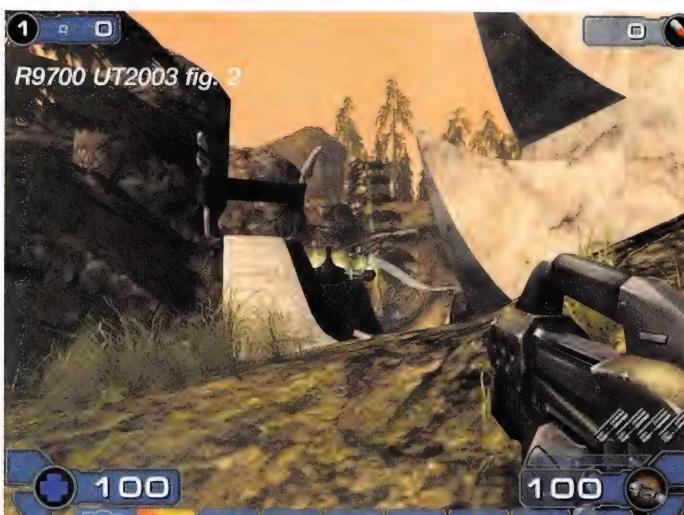
Seeing such high scores in Quake 3 Arena, 3DMark2001 SE, Unreal Tournament 2003 and even Comanche 4 made us wonder if

there was any benchmarking program or game currently available that could bring the R9700 to its knees. After much searching, we managed to obtain a synthetic DirectX 8.1 benchmark based on Codecult's Codecreatures engine. As you can see from the results, Codecreatures pushed the R9700 to its limits, not even allowing it to hit 40fps at 1024x768. Even so, the R9700 still managed to outperform the GeForce4 Ti4600 by around 30% under every resolution tested!

The final tests performed were done to gauge anisotropic filtering and anti-aliasing performance. Although it's quite obvious that the higher the sampling rate, the better quality

Anisotropic filtering

nVidia have long been critical of ATI's implementation of Anisotropic filtering because they used only bilinear samples in the process where nVidia use Trilinear samples that consume twice the memory bandwidth. The new anisotropic filtering options for the R9700 will allow for either a 'performance' setting which uses bilinear filtering and a quality setting that uses trilinear samples.

UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2003

the image will be, it is important that you realise the performance hit that comes with each. We were very pleased to see that on the Radeon 9700, the performance hit by both FSAA and anisotropic filtering is minimal. At long last, those that desire maximum image quality and high performance can have their cake AND eat it too!

Image Quality

One of the most important factors that is rarely given just consideration when purchasing a new graphics card is image

quality. It's all well and good that the card can run at 300+ FPS under a resolution of 1280x1024, however, if it doesn't look good then, what's the point?

To compare the R9700's image quality to that of the Ti4600, we adjusted all of our driver settings with maximum image quality being the primary focus, setting both anisotropic filtering and anti-aliasing to 16x and 6x respectively for the R9700, and 6x and 4xS for the Ti4600. We then proceeded to run through various applications that offer plenty of eye-candy, noting any specific differences in

image quality along the way. Test programs include: Unreal Tournament 2003, Quake 3 Arena, Comanche 4 and Codecreatures.

The overall quality of image produced by both the R9700 and Ti4600 is truly stunning. However, it is impossible for us to make a fair judgement as to which is better - Simply because we found the image quality on both the Radeon 9700 and GeForce4 Ti4600 to be virtually identical and there were only very slight differences (for example, the different effects of graduation on the sky in the UT2003

screenshots) that don't make the images look any better or worse. However, we are quite confident to say that, taking into account both the screenshots and anisotropic filtering/FSAA benchmarks, the Radeon 9700 provides the best ratio of image quality with performance. As for the floating point colour enhancements, these will become a lot more noticeable on any game that features heavy use of gouraud shading and as developers start to generate DX9 compatible texture sets with a much higher overall colour count and more accurate palette.

Unreal Tournament 2003 Demo - Flyby

ATI Radeon 9700

1024x768x32	195.8
1280x1024x32	160.1
1600x1200x32	109.7
GeForce4 Ti4600	
1024x768x32	174.2
1280x1024x32	117
1600x1200x32	76.9
40 60 80 100 120 140 160 180 200	

Unreal Tournament 2003 Demo - Botmatch

ATI Radeon 9700

1024x768x32	65.4
1280x1024x32	64.1
1600x1200x32	59.4
GeForce4 Ti4600	
1024x768x32	66.2
1280x1024x32	59.8
1600x1200x32	48.7
30 35 40 45 50 55 60 65 70	

Overclocking

After running through the plethora of benchmarking applications we had planned for the R9700, it was time to strap on our hard hats and protective goggles as we proceeded to overclock our R9700 to the brink of stability. However, rather than bunging on an extravagant water or vapour-phase cooling kit, during overclocking both our CPU and GPU were equipped with stock cooling and there was no more than four case fans installed in the Lian-Li PC60 case. Without getting into a rant over the pros/cons of extreme cooling, this was done to replicate the environment that the average user would be installing the R9700 into.

Using PowerStrip

(<http://www.entechtaian.com/ps.htm>), we managed to overclock the card to a core/memory clock speed of 351MHz/330MHz. This is quite a nice overclock from the default speed of 325MHz/310MHz, especially considering the cooling methods used. However, our overclocking attempts did not end here. We were quite curious to see how high a 3DMark2001 SE score we could obtain, so we proceeded to overclock our CPU as well. Again, using the stock Intel heatsink/fan unit, our 2.8GHz P4B hit a whopping 3164MHz!

At these speeds, we were able to clock a score of 15429 3DMarks using the default benchmark

3Dmark2001 SE - AGP 4x vs. AGP 8x 1024x768x32

ATi Radeon 9700

AGP 4x - 13877
AGP 8x - 14315

0000 | 2000 | 4000 | 6000 | 8000 | 10000 | 12000 | 14000 | 16000

3Dmark2001 SE - Full Scene Anti-Aliasing 1024x768x32

ATi Radeon 9700

No FSAA - 14315
2x - 12645
4x - 10625
6x - 8739

GeForce4 Ti4600

No FSAA - 11950
2x - 9632
4x - 6087
4xS - 5789

0000 | 2000 | 4000 | 6000 | 8000 | 10000 | 12000 | 14000 | 16000

settings of 1024x768x32! This is easily the highest 3DMark score we have ever achieved and we were simply stunned when the test had finally finished running. To ensure authenticity of this score, we have uploaded it to MadOnion's (the creators of 3DMark) Online Result Browser (AKA: ORB). It can be viewed at the following URL:<http://service.madonion.com/cmpare?2k1=4528436>

Conclusion

Need we say more? The ATi Radeon 9700 is clearly the highest

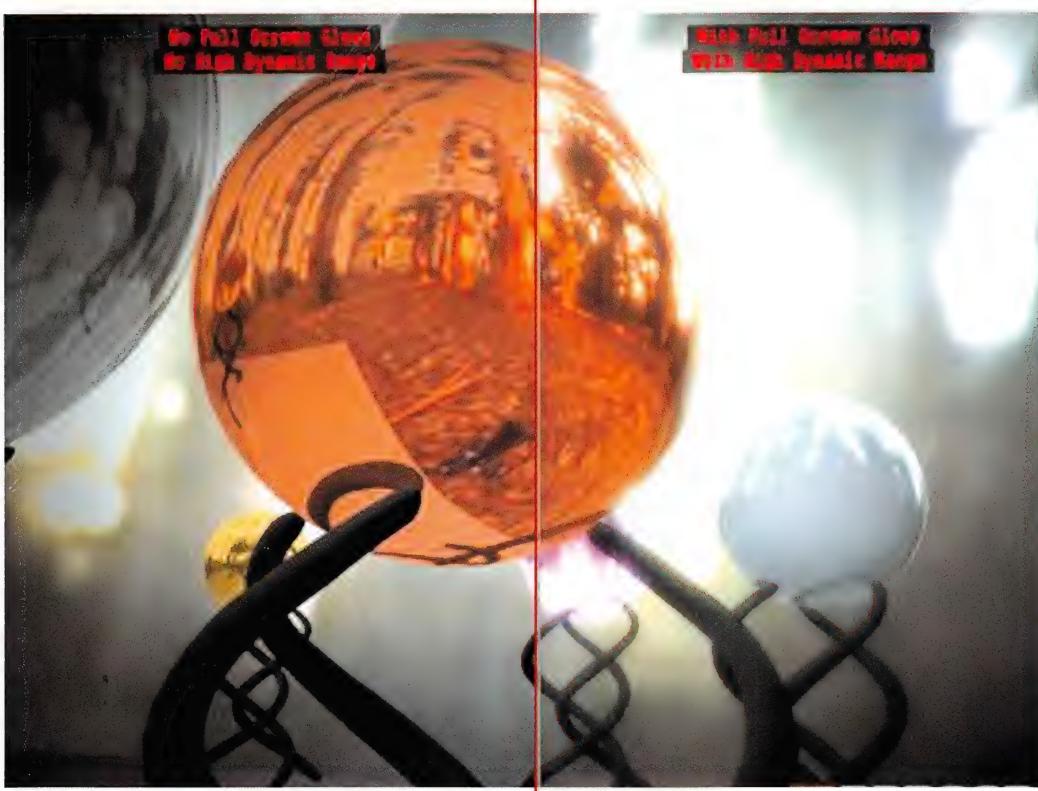
performing graphics chipset ever. Period. Not only does it significantly outperform nVidia's GeForce4 Ti4600 in terms of FPS, but its ability to produce superior frame rates with anti-aliasing and anisotropic filtering turned up to maximum puts it in a league of its own.

With nVidia's next generation graphics chipset, NV30, not set to hit the market until at least 2003,

ATi can happily enjoy their new market lead for quite some time to come. However, knowing nVidia, things won't stay quiet for long.

Jere Lawrence & Asher Moses.

SMARTSHADER



FLOATING POINT COLOUR!

Easily one of the most exciting aspects of the R9700, and DX9 for that matter is support for floating point colour. First, allow us to explain what floating point numbers are. In the world of computers there are two types of numerical variable definers. Integer numerics and floating point numerics. Integer numerics are whole numbers such as 1,2,3..99..1024 etc. Alternatively, Floating Point numerics are numbers with decimal places such as 1.23, 2.96, 1024.351 etc. Part of the new Pixel Shader 2.0 API of DX9, floating point precision is calculable to 128-bits, or 16 places for extremely precise colours.

Previously, the highest level of colour precision available for the PC were 32-bit integer numbers that allow for a colour palette of 2^{32} (4,294,967,296). Now although this range of colours is available from the desktop, in our games, only 24 of the 32 bits are actually being used in the render process.

The way it works is that the first 24 bits are broken up into 3 RGB(red/green/blue) values which can be mixed to make colours. The problem is that there is only 1 integer byte available to each channel allowing for only 255 shades of each primary colour that can be mixed to form the 16,777,216 palette we're all familiar with. The remaining 8 bits are used to carry the alpha value for translucent and transparent effects. But now, with floating point colour, for each of the 255 shades of the 3 channels there can now be graduations in the primary colours of up to 16 decimal places.

It's rather like the days of 16 vs 32 bit colour. Manufacturers of cards that only supported 16 bit colour would tell everyone that 65,536 colours were more than enough. Compared to 32 bit (24-bit actually) colour, it was clear that 16 bit colour was inferior. It's the same kind of quantum leap all over again between FP and integer colour with the best news being that any game, as long as it is DirectX compatible will take full advantage of the new DX9 uber-palette.

Everglide Optical Mouse Pads

■ Price: \$48 ■ Distributor: Everglide ■ URL: www.everglide.com ■ Phone: N/A

For the uninformed, a mouse pad is the piece of material that you glide your mouse over when using your PC. Before FPS (First Person Shooter) titles such as Quake III Arena, Tribes 2 and Counter-Strike became popular, many users did not even consider the fact that the type of mouse pad they used was hindering their performance, and it was not uncommon to see plain sheets of paper or even old motherboard manuals being used.

In today's FPS games, however, precision, accuracy and rapid movements are the key to success. Any serious FPS gamer will tell you that the type of mouse pad used has a massive impact on how well you play, and it is imperative that you are able to freely slide the mouse across the mousing surface without any hindrance whatsoever.

The pioneers of the gaming mouse pad industry, Everglide, have recently introduced five new mousing surfaces to their extensive range, aptly named "Optical". The Optical range comprises of: The Attack Pad Optical, coming in a mostly-clear colour as well as a "Smoke" colour. Then there's the Giganta Optical pad that, again, comes in clear and smoke colours. All 4 of these pads are made from a very durable, hard plastic. The fifth pad, named "Optica", is slightly different from the rest, as it resembles the more traditional soft mouse pad. However, instead of cloth it uses a vinyl surface and has a specific semi-rough texture and full colour image plastered over the top of it.

Form follows function

All of these pads were designed specifically for use with optical mice, and as you can see from the

above image, they are certainly very likely to be the first thing someone notices when sitting down at your PC. Believe it or not though, Everglide do have a reason for this "glittery" finish, that hasn't been cleverly thought up by their creative marketing team.

Your mouse's optical eye must detect a difference in the surface as the mouse moves over it. If the surface and/or image is too regular, the eye can't distinguish the differences in the surface as it moves and thus, cannot track. Therefore, the use of a high percentage of very light colours and just enough black (contrast medium) on the Optical range allows for more precise tracking.

To test the pads, multiplayer FPS title, Counter-Strike was used. Compared to the original Everglide mousing surface, the Optical pads allowed for slightly better tracking when used with a Microsoft

Intellimouse Explorer and their rough surface texture made lining up those all important headshots just that bit easier. All of the pads were comfortable to use due to their rounded edges and there was plenty of room to move across the surface of the pads.

And so...

Overall, if you are a serious gamer looking for a serious mousing surface, Everglide's Optical range does not disappoint. However, with the Giganta pads coming in at \$US17.95 and the smaller Attack pads selling for \$US15.95, they may be slightly out of reach for many of you. That said, with the vinyl covered "Optica" pad coming in at a bargain price of \$US9.95, Everglide does cater for a wide range of users and no matter what your budget, there should be a pad to suit you.

Asher Moses



	Giganta Clear	Giganta Smoke	Attack Pad Clear	Attack Pad Smoke	Optica
Surface Type	Plastic	Plastic	Plastic	Plastic	Vinyl / Rubber
Performs	Grippy / Responsive	Grippy / Responsive	Grippy / Responsive	Grippy / Responsive	Slippery
Size (H x W x D)	9.5 x 11.5 x 1/4"	9.5 x 11.5 x 1/4"	8 x 10.25 x 1/4"	8 x 10.25 x 1/4"	8 x 10.25 x 1/16"
Reactive Agent	4%	4%	4%	4%	N/A
Tint	Clear	Smoke	Clear	Smoke	N/A
Price	\$US 17.95	\$US 17.95	\$US 15.95	\$US 15.95	\$US 9.95

Excellent mousing surfaces that are slightly let down by a high price tag.

88

Asus A7V8x KT400 Motherboard

■ Price: TBA ■ Distributor: Acheiva ■ URL: www.acheiva.com ■ Phone: 02 9742 3288

Based on VIA's new KT400 chipset, the Asus A7V8X is probably the most feature-rich motherboard we have tested to date. Firstly, the board features onboard Gigabit LAN support through a Broadcom 5702 controller, offering a maximum transfer rate of 1000MBps. This is 10 times the speed of conventional 10/100 Ethernet devices and although it may be slightly overkill for the average user, large companies with huge networks will greatly benefit from this feature.

We were quite pleased when we saw that the board features both ATA133 and Serial ATA RAID support. This is great for users who currently own regular IDE hard drives but plan to upgrade to Serial ATA somewhere in the near future. FireWire (AKA: IEEE1394) support is also available through the VIA VT6306 controller, as well as 6-channel AC'97 audio provided by a RealTek ALC200 controller.

The board features a slot layout of six PCI, one AGP 8x and three DDR DIMM slots supporting a maximum of 3GB DDR400 memory.

The layout of the board is logical, with the ATX power header placed conveniently next to the IDE

headers. This ensures that the thick power cabling does not restrict airflow by running over the top of your heatsink/fan unit. Furthermore, there is plenty of room around the CPU socket for any abnormally large CPU cooler you may be thinking of installing, as well as four mounting holes for coolers that do not use the conventional mounting system.

Although the A7V8X's overall layout was quite good, we did have one small qualm. Due to the fact that the AGP and DIMM slots have been placed very close to each other, it is very difficult to add/remove memory with a video card installed. This is not too big a deal, however, it was certainly worth noting for those that tend to change their hardware configuration on a regular basis.

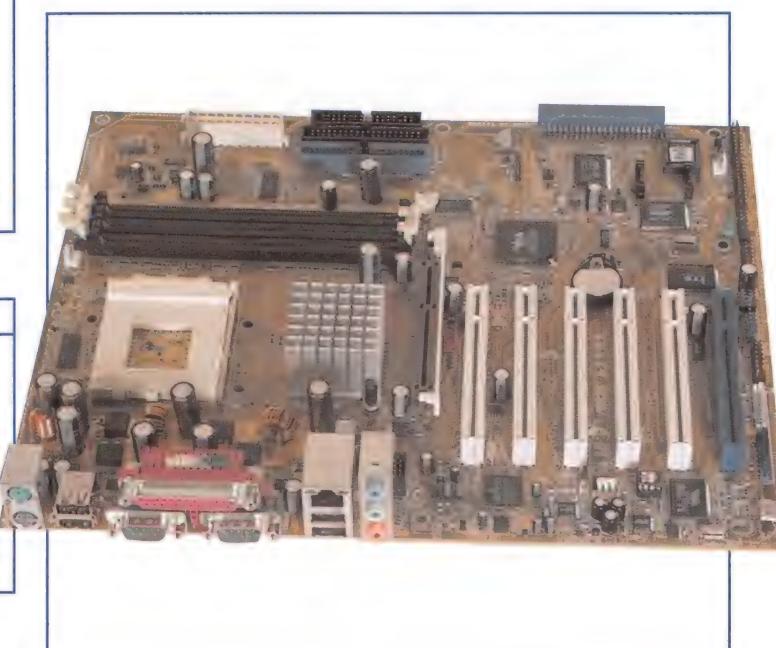
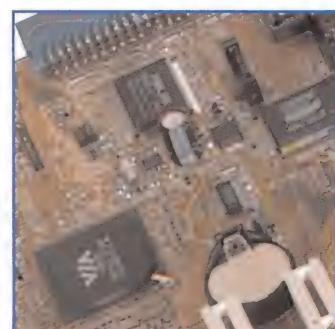
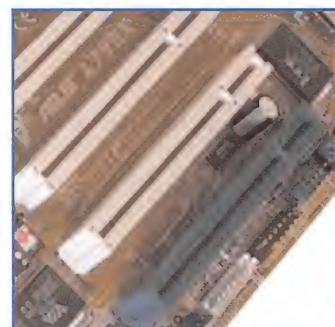
The board was tested on an AthlonXP 2200+ based system with 256MB of Corsair XMS3200 memory as well as an ATI Radeon 9700 graphics card. The BIOS used was AwardBIOS version 1006-01. As you will notice from the benchmarking graphs, although the board performed quite well, there was no real performance advantage over our DDR333 equipped Abit AT7. This is simply

because the Athlon's FSB allows no more than a peak bandwidth of 2.1GB/sec, meaning that the extra bandwidth provided by DDR333 (2.7GB/sec) and DDR400 (3.2GB/sec) is virtually unused.

As far as overclocking goes, the A7V8X is certainly not lacking, giving users the ability to adjust FSB speeds between 100MHz and 227MHz in 1MHz increments and multiplier adjustments between 5x and 22.5x. Core, AGP and DRAM voltages can also be adjusted to help you gain stability at high-overclocked speeds.

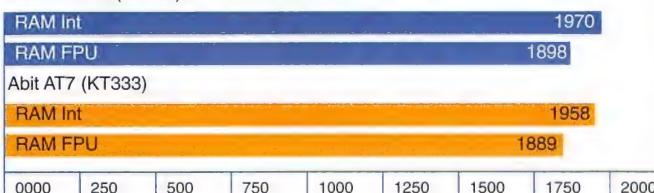
Overall, we were very pleased with the Asus A7V8X motherboard. It offers high performance, plenty of useful features and boasts a logical layout. Even though the KT400 chipset does not offer any extra performance over the KT333 chipset, the board's vast array of features alone may be enough for current KT333 users to make the upgrade. The bottom line is, if you are looking for a new motherboard, especially if you are upgrading from a chipset older than the KT333, you will not be disappointed with the Asus A7V8X.

Asher Moses



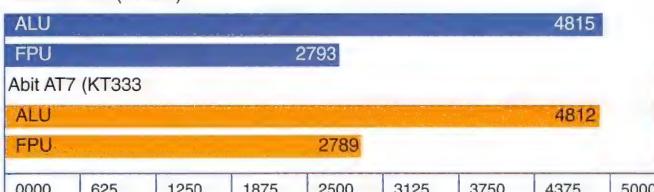
SiSoft Sandra 2002 - Memory Benchmark

Asus A7V8X (KT400)



SiSoft Sandra 2002 - CPU Benchmark

Asus A7V8X (KT400)



3DMark2001 SE - 1024x768 32bit Results

Asus A7V8X (KT400)



High performance, plenty of features and a great layout. Recommend.

90

AMD Athlon XP 2200+ & Intel Pentium 4 2.8GHz

AMD Athlon XP 2200+ ■ Price: \$390.50 ■ Distributor: Techbuy ■ URL: www.techbuy.com ■ Phone: 02 9648 1818

Intel Pentium 4.2GHz ■ Price: \$155 (with HSF) ■ Distributor: Altech ■ URL: www.altech.com ■ Phone: 02 9735 5655

Based on the new Thoroughbread core comes AMD's latest addition to the AthlonXP range, the 2200+(1.8GHz) - finally bringing the Athlon down to a 0.13-micron manufacturing process. The Thoroughbread core is virtually identical to the Palomino core seen on previous AthlonXP chips, however, the shrink to 0.13-micron does bring with it two major differences: voltage requirements and core size.

The new core size of 80mm² is tiny when compared to the Palomino, who's core comes in at a massive 128mm². What's the advantage of having such a small core size? Well, the smaller the core, the cheaper the manufacturing costs, thus allowing AMD to price their products much more competitively when compared to Intel who's Pentium 4 Northwood core is bigger than both the Thoroughbread and the Palomino at 146mm².

Furthermore, the die shrink has also allowed AMD to reduce the

processor's core voltage from 1.75V down to 1.65V. This is not a major difference, however, you should notice a slight decrease in operating temperatures.

We tested the processor on an Abit AT7 (KT333) motherboard with 256MB of Corsair XMS3200 memory and an ATI Radeon 9700 graphics card. It is important to note that in order to run the Thoroughbread on most KT333 and older motherboards you will need to download an updated BIOS from your motherboard manufacturer's website.

Although performance isn't up to the standards of Intel's Pentium 4 2.8GHz, if you consider that the AthlonXP 2200+ can be purchased for less than \$350 while the 2.8GHz P4 sells for around \$1100, it is clear to see which processor provides the best value for money. Overall, if you are looking for a high performing processor that won't cost you an arm and a leg, you will not be disappointed with the AthlonXP 2200+.

Recently, Intel announced the latest addition to their high-end desktop processor range, the Pentium 4 2.8GHz. This new chip features the same 533MHz FSB (133MHz quad-pumped) that has featured on all Pentium 4 chips since the 2.53GHz, as well a multiplier of 21.

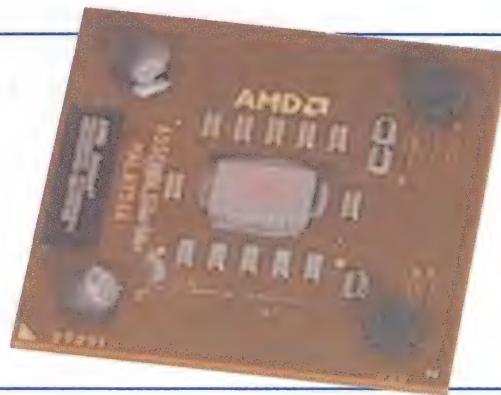
To tell you the truth, apart from the clock speed increase, nothing much has changed at all since Intel's last P4 release. However, in order to run at such high speeds, Intel were forced to raise the default core voltage from 1.500V to 1.525V. Keep in mind, though, that this is a very small increase and you should only see CPU temperatures rise by one or two degrees celsius, if that.

We tested the processor on an Albatron PX845E Pro II (Intel 845E chipset) based system running 256MB of Corsair XMS3200 as well as an ATI Radeon 9700 graphics card. For comparison purposes, we compared the chip to an AthlonXP 2200+(1.8GHz) running on an Abit AT7 motherboard. Due

to the fact that there is such a large difference in price/clock speed between these two processors, the graphs should only be used as a guide to give you an overall idea of how the chip performs against a high-end processor from AMD.

As you can see, the Intel Pentium 4 2.8GHz is truly a stellar performer. That said, this performance does come at a price and with the chip currently selling for around \$1100, it will certainly be well out of reach for many of you. Compare this to the AthlonXP 2200+, which can be purchased for less than \$350 and you can see why many users on a budget have jumped onto the AMD bandwagon since the release of the Pentium 4. The bottom line is, if you are looking for the highest performing processor available and will spare no cost to get it, the Intel Pentium 4 2.8GHz is the processor for you. However, if you are on a budget you should most likely look elsewhere.

Asher Moses



3DMark2001 SE - 1024x768 32bit Results

AthlonXP 2200+(1.8GHz)	11210
Intel Pentium 4 2.8GHz	12433
10000	10500
11000	11500
12000	12500



SiSoft Sandra 2002 - CPU Benchmark

AthlonXP 2200+(1.8GHz) ALU	4812
AthlonXP 2200+(1.8GHz) FPU	2789
Intel Pentium 4 2.8GHz ALU	5280
Intel Pentium 4 2.8GHz FPU	3518
0000	0500
1000	1500
2000	2500
3000	3500
4000	4500
5000	5500

AMD Athlon XP 2200+:
High performance, low price.

85

Intel Pentium 4 2.8GHz:
Very high performing processor let down by a high price.

82

Abit SR7-8X

■ Price: \$231 ■ Distributor: Techbuy ■ URL: www.techbuy.com ■ Phone: 02 9648 1818

SiS have historically been known for their excellent OEM and budget products, however, they have recently entered the high-end enthusiast market as well and have since gained quite a positive reputation. Their SiS645/DX chipset was the first to bring DDR333 memory support to the Pentium 4 and at the time of its release, was the fastest P4 chipset available. Naturally, we were excited when we received the Abit SR7-8X motherboard, based on SiS's SiS648.

The board features a slot layout of 5 PCI, 1 AGP8X and 3 DDR DIMM slots supporting a maximum of 2GB PC1600, PC2100 or PC2700 memory. Furthermore, the board features 2-channel AC97 audio, a Realtek 10/100 Ethernet controller, USB 2.0 and ATA133 support. We were slightly disappointed at the lack of RAID support, however, the positive side to this is that it will help reduce the overall price of the board. As we've mentioned on numerous occasions in previous issues, the 2-channel audio controller is great for general windows use, however,

gamers and avid music listeners should steer clear.

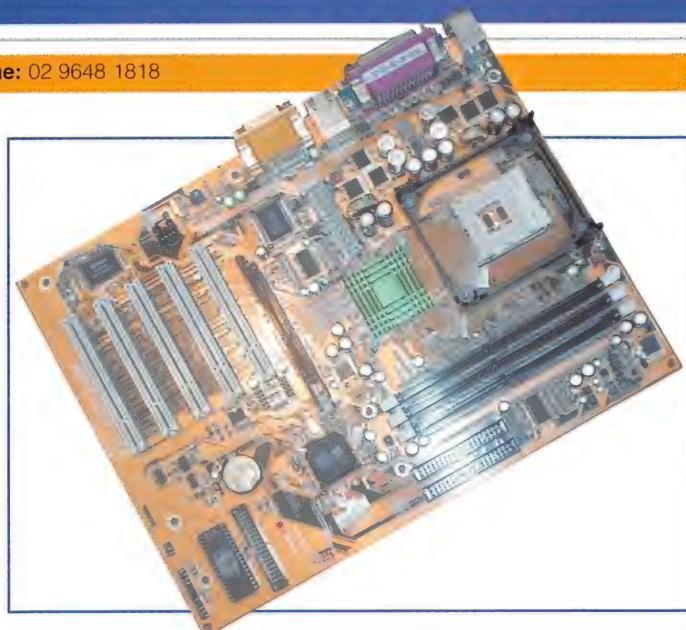
The layout of the board is logical, with the ATX power header placed conveniently under the CPU socket and the IDE headers sitting snugly beside the DIMM slots. This ensures that cabling does not run over your heatsink/fan unit, restricting airflow.

The BIOS includes all of the usual customisations we have come to expect from Abit. These include: FSB adjustments up to 200MHz in 1MHz increments, VCore and DIMM voltage modifications, and the ability to lock your AGP and PCI bus at a speed of your choice, eliminating them from bottlenecking your overclocking attempts.

As far as performance goes, the board performed admirably and managed to significantly outperform the DDR266 equipped i845E chipset in all benchmarks.

Overall, the Abit SR7-8X offers high performance, great layout and is highly customisable. At a price of around \$210, the board is recommended.

Asher Moses



3DMark2001 SE - 1024x768 32bit Results

Abit BD7II-RAID(i845E)	6612
Abit SR7-8X (SiS648)	8802
6200	6400
6600	6800
7000	7200

High performing, great layout and a low price.
Recommended.

90

Thrustmaster F1 Force Feedback Racing wheel

■ Price: \$399.95 ■ Distributor: Thrustmaster ■ URL: www.thrustmaster.com ■ Phone: 02 8303 1818

An initial look at the wheel doesn't necessarily illicit much response, but racing fans will immediately recognise it as the official Momo wheel used in Ferrari F1 formula one cars. That's because Thrustmaster have licensed and replicated Ferrari's official wheel.

The layout of the wheel is very accurate and as the manual proudly proclaims in a side by side shot of the original Ferrari wheel and the Thrustmaster offering, everything is exactly in the same place. The dimensions of the wheel are the same, the location of the buttons are the same and even the type and style of the buttons are all identical to the Momo original. Curiously, this makes the product a little difficult to review as I found the buttons awkward to reach and their style most unusual. However, being a replica wheel, this brings authenticity to the racing experience which many keen motor heads are likely to really appreciate.

Being a USB device the wheel is easy to install and unlike 15-pin gameport wheels, is fully compatible

with Windows XP. The supplied software offers the omnipresent keyboard re-mapper that allows you to associate keys to buttons on the controller. Although the software is easy to use, the inclusion of re-mapping software with each and every controller is getting annoying. Why the heck isn't this a function of DirectX and the Windows control panel anyway?

The feel of the wheel is quite good but being Force Feedback suffers from the ratchetting effect. That's to say with every turn of the wheel you feel tiny vibrations, like the clicks of a ratchet. Still, the wheel performs well, is very precise and those used to Force Feedback effects won't be fazed at all.

Of the Force Feedback effects, they're all very good and it should be noted that this wheel is quite strong. If the game tells the wheel to pull to the left, it will certainly pull you left. The Force Feedback effects however can be tamed within the control panel for comfort. All the normal Force Feedback effects abound, it can shake, rock, vibrate and waggle

you into a serene gaming state of complete immersion. There is one major gripe that can be made against the F1 wheel though and that is of the pedals. The base is too small and they slide around the floor unable to grip even coarse carpet.

Jere Lawrence



This wheel will have massive appeal to F1/racing fans, but for the rest of us may be a little too expensive.

92

Promedia Klipsch THX 2.1 speakers

■ Price: \$425 ■ Distributor: Techbuy ■ URL: www.techbuy.com ■ Phone: 02 9648 1818

Made for PC speakers have a rather embarrassing history from an audio lover's point of view. The spending potential of the average PC owner is quite limited when it comes to audio equipment and thus manufacturers are forced to cut more corners and make more compromises than in any other area of their business. Klipsch is an American brand with some reputation in the audio world and this speaker set is designed to sit in the high end category of PC audio.

They come with a THX certification, but don't be too impressed. It's just the Multimedia THX standard, not the home cinema standard which is very much more rigorous.

The system works with a preamp in one of the speakers controlling the power amp in the subwoofer box. That particular speaker also has a headphone jack for private listening if noise is a problem. The supplied leads are nice and long and the overall finish of the product is very good. On paper the Klipsch look quite

impressive: 32Hz-20 kHz Frequency range, 200 watts RMA and 106dB peak power, distortion .2%, you'll even find a plethora of rave reviews online at many PC sites.

Let's get straight to the nitty gritty, the amplifier built into the Klipsch is substandard. It distorts horribly before you've boosted the output to half way, the dome tweeters built in to the satellite cabinets are also not up to the task and too much volume has them screeching and hissing like a cut snake. Satellite systems usually suffer from poor midrange performance and the Klipsch are no exception with mid frequencies washed out by the sub-bass driver which seems to be poorly matched to the satellite pair. Turning the sub level up anywhere past the minimum amount drowns everything in flubber.

At \$425 we can't expect audiophile performance but it's annoying when the so called 'high-end' PC audio products aren't even as good as a dodgy second hand Sanyo amp and some speakers from Saint Vinnies!

George Soropos



Taken as themselves, these are nice. But really this is sub-standard quality considering the price.

65

Altec Lansing XA3021

■ Price: \$209 (With HSF) ■ Distributor: Aus PC Market ■ URL: www.auspcmarket.com ■ Phone: 02 9817 2899



A very capable budget speaker system that should be considered by anyone looking for an affordable 2.1 system for their PC or console.

77

Are you looking for a new speaker system for your PC or console but can't afford the exorbitant price placed on high-end 5.1 units? Well, Altec Lansing believe they have just the setup for you in their latest 2.1 speaker system, the XA3021.

The XA3021 is powered by two 3-inch stereo satellite speakers and one 5.25-inch long-throw sub, giving a total system power of 40watt. As well as this, the system comes bundled with a small wired controlling unit that features volume controls, two headphone jacks and an EQ mode selector. Bass equalization can be adjusted between three levels: Max Bass, Gaming and TV. Obviously, TV being the lowest level of bass and Max Bass being the highest.

Although the bass response from these speakers won't exactly throw you from your chair, it still accentuates the bangs and booms perfectly.

The sub-woofer features all of the usual primary RCA inputs and outputs, however, we were

pleased to see that Altec have also included a 3.5mm stereo auxiliary input that allows you to use the speakers with portable MP3 or CD players.

So how do they sound? Well, compared to the \$2 speakers that are often bundled with OEM PCs or the sound output from your average TV, I am pleased to say that the Altec Lansing XA3021 speaker system is a very solid setup and is perfectly capable of giving you an immense gaming experience. That said, sound quality was not up to the standards of some of the more expensive units we've tested, however, that is basically a given and at a price of around \$180, they are definitely among the best available for their price range.

Overall, if you're on a budget and looking for a new speaker system, whether you are a gamer or just enjoy listening to music, you won't be disappointed with the Altec Lansing XA3021 speaker system.

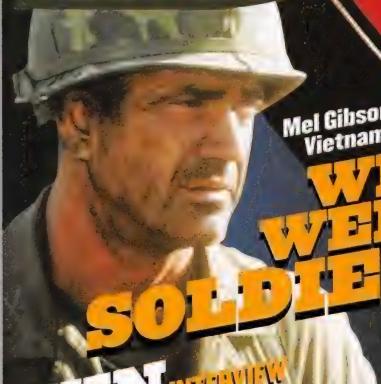
Asher Moses

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*THE KING OF
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Stephen King

next



27

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REVIEWS: Spiderman, Grease,
One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest,
Panic Room, Not Another Teen
Movie, Queen of the Damned,
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THE BEAST

THE MOST POWERFUL GAMING PC GOOD MONEY CAN BUY

Yes, it has finally happened. The king of video is no longer the GeForce4 Ti 4600 but instead is the brand spanking new ATI R9700. The beast, with its insatiable appetite for all things newer and more powerful was quick to devour this silicon delicacy. The burp could be heard throughout the entire building.

CPU, MEMORY AND MOTHERBOARD

Intel Pentium 4 2.80GHz

At 2.80GHz on a 533MHz FSB, this P4B is the fastest CPU your money can buy. With good cooling, it has excellent overclocking potential.
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ASUS P4T533-C (Intel 850e)

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\$400 www.asus.com.tw



2GB RD-RAM 1066MHz

You could buy a PC at the cost of this RAM but with 2GB you'll be moving so fast you can predict the future, and maybe make your money back.
\$2500 www.techbuy.com.au 1 300 368 238



Swiftech H202-C Water Cooling Kit

Kinda noisy yet strangely sexy in an industrial fetishistic kind of way, the H202-C cooler will cope with all your insane overclocking needs.
\$450 www.swiftnets.com



Antec TruePower 550W PSU

At 550w, this PSU can reliably power an abundance of devices inside your PC. Smooth stable output and a temperature sensor that regulates fan speed.
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SETUP

STUART CALVIN WAXES TECHNICAL

LETTER OF THE MONTH

LOTM

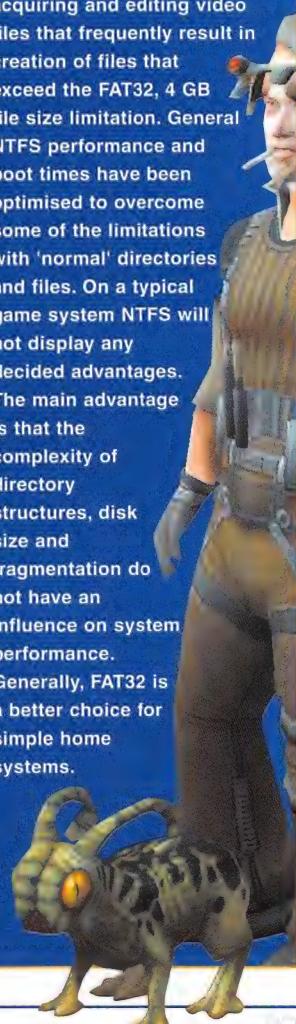
I recently formatted my hard drive to install WinXP and noticed that I had the option of choosing either a FAT32 file system or an NTFS files system. I was interested in which was better (for gaming use) and what the differences between the two were.

Bernard Davis
Psycho Blade Guy

This is a very detailed topic so checkout ntfs.com/ntfs.htm for more information. But to answer you in terms of gaming and perhaps general use, there are two ways of looking at it. First, a straight comparison. FAT Highs: FAT requires less RAM than NTFS. FAT is faster with small directories of normal structure; there is less disk head movement (as compared with NTFS); effective on slower disks. FAT lows: quick performance decrease as fragmentation increases; difficulty in access to big files (particularly more than 10% of the disc space); very slow work with directories containing huge amount of files and forget files over 4 GB in size. NTFS highs:

Fragmentation does not influence the system performance (work may degrade as far as data access is concerned); complex directory structures and the number of files do not affect performance; fast access to file fragments (i.e. editing big WAV or AVI files); very fast access to small files (several hundred bytes). NTFS lows: The memory size shouldn't be less than 64MB. Slow disks and controllers, without Bus Mastering, slow the system performance down tremendously. The work with average size directories is quite difficult, since they are fragmented. A disk working for a prolonged period, with 80% - 90% of its space occupied,

displays low performance. The other way of looking at it is to decide if any of these features appeal to you: security and access control; distributed link tracking; hard links for files; symbolic links for directories; more efficient context indexing; file compression; file encryption; volume shadow copy backup; flexible metadata support for attributes, properties, and streams; ability to mount a local drive to a folder on an NTFS volume. Additionally, there are further NTFS improvements found only in WinXP such as native support for NTFS volumes on giant-normous disks and support for a maximum NTFS file size of up to the disk size. Given this, WinXP features support for acquiring and editing video files that frequently result in creation of files that exceed the FAT32, 4 GB file size limitation. General NTFS performance and boot times have been optimised to overcome some of the limitations with 'normal' directories and files. On a typical game system NTFS will not display any decided advantages. The main advantage is that the complexity of directory structures, disk size and fragmentation do not have an influence on system performance. Generally, FAT32 is a better choice for simple home systems.



WHOOPS!

In recent issues you seem to be a little misguided about the networking abilities of WinXP when coupled with Win9x. I have seen at least two instances where you have advised readers that in order to share files with Win9x, that the XP machine needs to have a FAT share as Win9x can't read NTFS partitions. What a load of bollocks!

Aaron Clegg

Damn straight!

I may not be as bright as you but at least Spellchecker works on my machine.

WRONG AGAIN!

Calvin you are wrong about Win9x not being able to see folders on a NTFS formatted drive. I have two Win98 boxes which are used on a LAN for gaming. There are also two Win2K and two NT4 boxes on the same LAN and I can save to and retrieve files from the NT4 and Win2K machines without any

Damn straight! It was a dog's breakfast wasn't it? Quite right, I have swept all the drugs from my desk. And you can call me Stuart.

BREAKFAST SCHOOL

This is in regards to a response to Network Grief, by Zom_au. The answer given was wrong to say the least. The shared folder from the XP machine does NOT have to be FAT32!! How the hell do Win9x workstations see NT server shares in a corporate environment for example! The problem is either going to be that the user name that the 9x machines are logging in as aren't set up on the XP system, or alternatively the guest account isn't on. Or the machines are sitting in a different workgroup! Which school of Microsoft networking did you learn at? The WheeTees one?

Lurch

It was a dog's breakfast wasn't it ;)

PLANTY AFOOT

After reading the letter named "Hardware Grief" and hearing the response that your magazine made i have come to the conclusion that you arent very bright. Im running 1 xp box and 2 ME boxes on a LAN. The XP box runs NTFS and i can view all computers from any station. Why you ask. Becuase files which come from the network are automatically transferred to the machines file type. Therefore, i can move a file from my XP machine to 1 of my ME machines and when it arrives to the ME machine, it will be converted to fat32. And vice versa. Also, yes im running ICS as well. Theres plenty of articles on the net about this if you need to do research.

CRO

trouble. These are both NTFS formatted, not FAT. To set this up the folders on the NTFS boxes have to be set to share with everyone and a share name set. Also the Win9x boxes must use the same logon as the NTFS machines. In my case all the boxes have a user called patron and logging on with this user allows access. The same user needs to be setup on all boxes as otherwise the Win2K and NT4 boxes will not allow access to the shared folders. Also for the network setup make sure to have the Win9x boxes setup with Client for Microsoft Networks protocol.

Alistair

Quite correct. I have swept all the drugs from desk. And you can call me Stuart.

ALL IS NOT LOST

Just wanted to comment on the Network Grief letter in this months mag. You told the reader that the reason why the share on the XP box can't be seen by the WinMe boxes was because XP was running NTFS while the WinMe boxes were running FAT32 file system. NTFS and FAT doesn't matter when sharing a folder/file/drive. When you share a resource, a third file system comes into play (don't know exactly how it works, but we had a big discussion about it at TAFE!). Anyways, teacher told us that sharing something over a network lets any FAT/NTFS machine see it. To make

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sure I wasn't making an ass outta myself writing this I checked my server at work, and sure enough all drives/shares are on NTFS partitions and all workstations are Win98SE. It's a pretty sure bet the subnet mask solution you provided is probably the right one. Maybe he setup TCP/IP stuff for the dial-up adaptor but not the NIC TCP/IP one? Or maybe WinMe is just a poor OS and he should go back to Win98SE :) Anyways just figured I'd throw my 2c in. Great mag keep up the good work.

Dutch

If only I could just get that 2c for every letter...

DOH!

I'm also having some troubles with my LAN setup, but there is one thing you got wrong in that letters response. An NTFS drive can be read on a FAT 32 drive via a LAN, but they can't read each other if they are both drives in the same pc.

Nightlife

I know, I know...

I purchased an Iwill XP333 board last December and it's been great until I decided to (finally) upgrade to another 256MB PC2100 DDR RAM (making 2 X 256MB sticks).

MONEY OR THE BOX

Every time I turn on my PC the internet connection box comes up and you can't close it because every single time that you do it brings up another one. The constant opening of this box is making my PC seize up and it makes games freeze constantly.

Jonno

You have a program that wants to connect (possibly even a virus) - simple as that. I couldn't find any behaviour by design issues about this in the Microsoft Knowledge Base. Check your startup configuration by typing MSCONFIG in the Start/Run box and identify every startup program; uncheck them one at a time until you find the culprit; search for it and see if

you can determine the maker from its home folder. You may have a rogue dialer (dialer.exe or dx.exe), seeking to make expensive (for you!) ISD calls.

DIAL A FRAG

Let me first congratulate you on your article about networking...made it so much easier. But, I have heard that you can link two computers up by dialing the other computer and have a one-on-one session with your friend. Is that true and possible? How can I get myself started? I have WinXP and my friend has WinMe and we are tired from driving 160 Km just to frag each other...

Richard Sollorz, Euston

It depends on the game. Many have the option, like WarCraft II, to dial another modem and play that way. Just checkout the network menu in each game. Some games also allow you to create a controlled game accessible to only those with passwords.

(Richard, another way this can

BLACK ICE

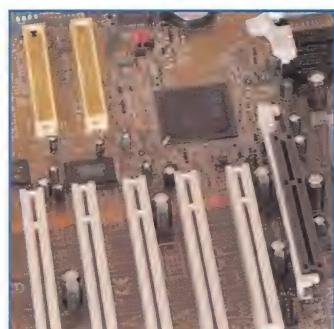
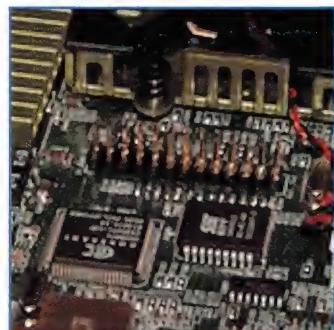
My problem is that both of my computers on the LAN only randomly decide to display the other connected computer in Network Neighborhood/My Network Places respectively. Sometimes they won't even show their own shared drives in their own NN/MNP. All the IPs and subnet masks are okay. My PCs are running NTFS XPPro and FAT32 Win98, both have the Black Ice firewall running, but both PCs are trusted so it doesn't need to be turned off (still have the troubles with it off). Win98 has a Surecom, XPPro has on-board LAN with the ASUS P4B533-E motherboard. In Network Connections it displays Local Area Connection and 1394 Connection. I have no idea what the 1394 Connection is. I run the computers through a Kingmax KH 2308, 8 port hub and have friends hook up on weekends. They can see all the shared drives when I turn the firewall off. I really hate having to share files via burning to CDRW or dear god....floppy swaps

Nightlife

The 1394 connection is a FireWire port, somewhere on your system, be it on your sound card, motherboard or a rear backplane you've forgotten about. Firewalls - ugh! Black Ice, like ZoneAlarm may need uninstalling occasionally to release the ports it's closed at random or via a setting that you've inadvertently made. If each PC can ping "localhost" but not each other and the Host can reach the internet, then the problem is cabling, firewall or the switch/hub. My money's on the firewall so try removing Black Ice from just the Client to begin with. I've had to uninstall ZoneAlarm Pro too many times for it to be of much long term value.

I WILL, I WON'T

First of all, I loved the extremely in-depth memory discussion in PCPP #77 - very informative! I purchased an Iwill XP333 board last December and it's been great until I decided to (finally) upgrade to another 256MB PC2100 DDR RAM (making 2 X 256MB sticks). It only recognises one lot of



SETUP

STUART CALVIN WAXES TECHNICAL

256MB. I've done all the usual stuff like test the different DIMMs, made sure RAM isn't faulty, upgrade to the latest BIOS etc.

Kermiac - The Dark Son.....

Well, this problem didn't exactly set the AMDMB.com Iwill forum alight when I posted but some interesting points were raised. The xpr0411 BIOS fixes many issues with this board, particularly improving Samsung DDR compatibility and the DIMMs are apparently also difficult to seat properly. DIMM slot #1 may be slightly more 'used' than the other slots. So while both DIMMs work in Slot #1, can you get them to work in the other slots? This board also likes matched DIMMs, that is, are they from the same manufacturer, same CAS Latency for example? It's not uncommon for a board to reject one of a mixed set. Because it takes some force to seat the DIMMs I recommend you do this with the board removed from the case taking all the usual precautions so as not to crack any dry tracks. If you're friendly with a local PC vendor maybe they'll test the board for you...

SOF2 DEMO PROBLEM

I recently bought your September issue of PC Powerplay and I installed the SOF2 (Soldier of Fortune 2) demo. After it loaded the Seaward Star demo the music kept going on and off and on and off and so on until it got to the opening scene. When I started playing the level it was going a bit slow and the sound was not that great. I was thinking of buying SOF2 until I saw how the demo worked on our computer. I was wondering the full game would work on our computer or not because the demo did not work that well? We have a WinXP, 256MB DDR RAM, Intel Extreme Graphics, 1.7 GHz and P4. Also I want to know how much memory the Intel Extreme Graphics card has?

Mark

Quite simply there is no Video RAM on this graphics adaptor. The Intel 845G (dedicated AGP 4X slot) and 845GL chipsets feature "Integrated Extreme Graphics", aimed towards

SHARING WOES

On several occasions I've talked about NTFS and FAT incompatibilities. In the one box or using external FireWire and USB connections, these two file formats cannot talk to each other across the bus. For example if one disk, of two or more is NTFS and the others are FAT32 then there is no chance, without additional measures, of reading the NTFS disk contents in a non-NTFS 'aware' OS like Win9x. This situation generally arises if the box dual-boots into NTFS WinXP (or Win2K) and FAT Win9x. If you store data on the NTFS disk that you may need while in Win9x then it's a matter of further planning.

However, all file formats can talk across a network using one or more network protocols. My recent advice can only be considered drug related and I apologise for this. Along with random PC lockups, a faulty network is up there with bamboo under the finger nails. Judging by the number of letters I have about home networking, I'll spend a little more time on the subject. Keep uppermost in your mind that networks 'fall over' for what seem to be inexplicable reasons.

Most home/gaming networks will need three installed protocols. TCP/IP is possibly the most important because, on its own, it can provide an Internet connection, Internet connection sharing (ICS), file and printer sharing and network/Internet gaming. This protocol must be sorted before any others are installed so that the other protocols can't mask any problems with TCP/IP. Look at this way: only TCP/IP can connect you to the internet and provide ICS. Over a network most games will run on just TCP/IP, some require IPX/SPX and some will work with both but it's likely that you'll need both anyway given any range of games. TCP/IP for File and Printer sharing support is a no-no for mere mortals. NetBEUI (pronounced net-BOO-ee or NetBios Enhanced User Interface) is the best performance and security choice for communication within a single home LAN and you should use it for File and Printer sharing.

Because, like NetBIOS, it does not support the routing of messages to other networks. To make sure you get it right, go here for instructions: practicallynetworked.com/sharing/netbeui.htm

Microsoft has discontinued support for NetBEUI in WinXP (see MSKB Article Q306059). For those who are planning to migrate to WinXP by obtaining the full, retail-released version of WinXP (or are already there), the NetBEUI protocol can be found on the WinXP CD-ROM under the \valueadd\msft\net\netbeui\ directory. Microsoft KB Article Q301041 describes the process for manually installing the unsupported NetBEUI protocol on a computer running WinXP. The NetBEUI files will need to be manually copied from the WinXP CD-ROM before NetBEUI will show up in the list of installable network protocols. Remember, get TCP/IP working first before you do this.

There is also a new behavior with WinXP on network access, when using usernames without any passwords. Although WinXP allows a logon without passwords, it requires that passwords are defined for users, when such users like to connect via the network to shared resources on the WinXP system. Trying to access from Win9x to WinXP with matching usernames but using passwords will result in an "Unknown Error 31". The solution is to define on both systems a password for this user or use the Group-Policy Editor to allow network access without passwords. If you get the request to enter a password on connection to a WinXP Pro system for the IPC\$ resource, then there is a mismatch between the username/password and permission defined on the WinXP system and the username/password used when making the logon to the Win9x system. Win2K users should read Microsoft KB Article Q258717 "Configuring Windows 2000 Professional to Work in a Peer-to-Peer Workgroup". Overall, if you have problems then just persevere. If they persist and you find yourself dumbstruck or gob-smacked then mail me and I'll see what I can do.

cheap rendering workstations - the average business or home PC user. The performance sacrificed for the integrated graphics won't be noticeable to these mugs but bung on a game like SoF2 and you'll notice the difference. Lacking on the i845G is a Hardware Transform and Lighting engine as well as hardware anti-aliasing. This will cause a major impact on newer games as they perform poorly without a T&L engine. The Extreme Graphics architecture dynamically allocates graphics memory as needed to balance up to 64MB of system memory usage among the operating system, applications, and graphics. The BIOS initially dedicates up to 8MB of system memory for graphics display, and the Intel graphics driver submits a request for increased memory to the OS when the application requests more memory. The OS can grant the request based on available system memory, and the memory is returned to the OS when the application no longer requires the additional support. Since all the P4/Celeron Willamette-128's embedded graphics utilize shared memory architecture, memory bandwidth has to be sacrificed to be used for the graphics frame buffer, unlike the nForce, which utilizes a Twin Bank memory architecture and is able to supply the embedded graphics with its on-memory channel. Clocking in with a 200 MHz core the 3D support for the i845G is pretty basic. Here's a handy chart that explains available memory for the I845G:

System Memory:

Maximum Memory Allocated for Graphics

0-127 MB:

Unsupported

128 MB:

32MB available vid memory

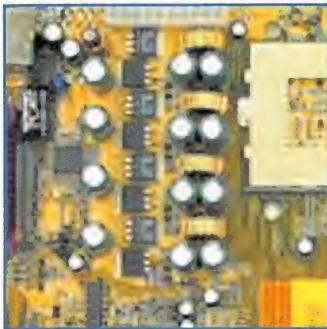
129 MB+:

64MB

UNLUCKY

realise you had a major feature on this recently and some follow up...but I'm still stuffed if I know. In particular I just don't know how to go about hooking up the 2 pin S/PDIF from my DVD player to

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anything. My soundcard is a GAMETHEATER XP which I was sure would not be a problem but the card itself only has the standard 4-pin analog plugs (I noticed a friend's \$75 SoundBlaster had the 2 pin S/PDIF plug on the card and it works a treat). The GAMETHEATER XP has digital inputs on the breakout box but I obviously can't go from 2 pin to optical. Is it possible to get a 2 pin to coaxial? AREGGGGRRHHRH it's all too hard.

Darren Moxham



The other day a mate tells me that my computer wouldn't have enough power to run a GeForce, is this at all true? My computer has a Duron 1.2GHz CPU, 250MB of SDRAM, and I am using WinMe.



Yep, it's a worry. 2-pin to co-ax? I don't think so... You've got a DB44 connector to the rack, a 1/8" auxiliary line-in jack, internal 4-pin MPC connectors for CD-audio and Aux2-In and not much else on the actual card. The Game Theatre XP is designed to get digital audio off the disk and into external devices such as MiniDisc and DAT (digital to audio tape) as well as decode or deliver bit streams like DTS and Dolby from external players. Think positively about the range of goodies on the break-out box and just learn to live with the digital to analogue converter on your PC DVD-ROM.

NEVER EVER?

Ever since reading about Neverwinter Nights in PCPP #75 I have decided that I don't care if I get nothing else for Christmas except that game - even if I have to buy it myself! Normally I wait till a game has been superceded and I can buy it from K-Mart for \$9.95, but judging from the amount of mustard pickle tinted drool on the review page, I cannot - no I will not - wait that long. My question is in regard to system requirements. The hair may be greying, but the heart is young - unfortunately the brain, however, has trouble keeping up with all the new fangled gee-haws you young folk come up with to



part us old fogies from our dollars. My partner has recently purchased (for my daughter and I) an AMD XP1700, 256MB RAM, 40GB HDD with a Voodoo5. In issue #77 you specify a GeForce2 or ATI Radeon for optimum game play. Will the Voodoo5 handle the pace? My partner would go nuts if I tell him we need to spend more dollars just to play one game.

Linda Swift

Hail, fair maiden, fear not for you are fearlessly arrayed for some decent game play. But first, check out

I think you left out an "X" and meant the GA-7VTXE+. The latest BIOS is F5 dated 28 Jun 2002 (7vtxe+_f5.zip). From your letter I take it that you don't know how to flash the BIOS? Instructions on how to do this are found at http://tw.giga-byte.com/support/mmbios_index.htm please follow them carefully. It is not uncommon for the BIOS to incorrectly recognise an AMD CPU. Go into the BIOS at bootup and choose "defaults", which, more often than not, corrects the problem of identification.

HUNGRY AMD

I was looking into upgrading my old TNT2 to either a GeForce 2 or 3. But the other day a mate tells me that my computer wouldn't have enough power to run a GeForce, is this at all true? My computer has a Duron 1.2GHz CPU, 250MB of SDRAM, and I am using WinMe. This fellow also tells me that Durons usually burn out or lose most of their power after a year. Of course he owns a Celeron. Is there any truth to what this guy is saying?

David

He's jealous because your Duron can eat Celerons for brekkie, even after a year or more. Depending on your motherboard you may be able to go for a GeForce4 MX 440 but be warned; the GeForce2 range are getting harder to find especially the GTS and Ultra models. Otherwise he has a point, a G4Ti is rather underutilised in anything less than an AMD XP1700+ / P4B.

NEW KEYBOARD

I WAS READING ISSUE 77 AND I CAME ACROSS THE BEASTIE I REALIZED I HAD ENOUGH MONEY TO PURCHASE ISSUE 77 BEASTIE SO I ORDERED IT AND I JUST RECEIVED LAST WEEK I'M RUNNING IT ON XP BUT IT IS RUNNING SLOW, CAN YOU TELL ME WHAT I SHOULD DO?

PETER

Take it back to the PC vendor. Oh, and get a new keyboard because your Caps Lock seems to be stuck.

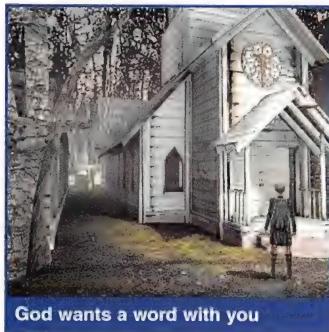
Chris Weston

ORACLE

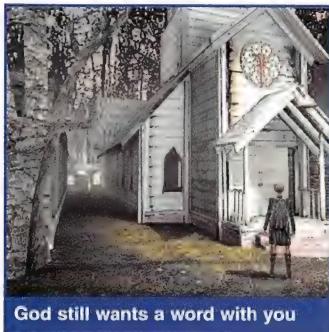


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God wants a word with you



God still wants a word with you



Midas wants a word with you



Resident evil wants a word with you

There's 2 types of people in the world: those that love details and those suffering from chronic vagueness. Before you badger the Oracle with pleas for help in finding the magic cow pat, give a thought to explaining where you are in the game. Nothing makes my badger more antsy, then having to guess. Gaming guru does not equal psychic telepath.

Blair Witch Project: Episode 1, Rustin Parr

I wonder if you could please provide assistance for Blair Witch Rustin Parr. Day three in the forest, I've been everywhere, and I am "not yet ready to leave the forest, though I have been thinking of it". I've been to Coffin Rock, Parr's house, and Asgaya. I've killed all creatures bar those Stick men that don't die. I suspect that while I was back in town I was supposed to analyse the audio, and I tried, changing bass, treble etc, it always sounded the same, it was some kind of stupid puzzle. I fear if I don't get hope soon, I will surely destroy this game, my PC, or myself.

Stephan Davies

Ah Blair Witch Project, the movie that celebrates the glory that is snot. Mary Brown's recording: bass - 4; treble - 2; frequency 5; pitch is 2nd from left; played forwards. Forest recording: bass - 2; treble - 5; frequency - 3; pitch is 2nd from right; played backwards. When you were back in time getting clues in Parr's house, did you also go to Coffin Rock to pick up Mary's "pet", Mr Brownie? Returning to the real world makes the forest shift and at this stage you must fight the giant Stick creature. This creature is a djinn, who gets power from hearts buried under rocks at its resting place. It also has glowing red pouches hanging off it that when shot at (while glowing) will weaken it. Shooting these and kicking the rock piles disrupt the power source, and that djinn is now djinner.

Next talk to Jonathan Pyre. Check in with Asgaya who has information about Jonathan. Asgaya wants a new twana; the clues are found in Pyre's journal and what you saw in Parr's attic.

When that's done Asgaya will send you back to town and the day ends. Grab the ammo and first aid kit in Asgaya's hut before you go.

The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind Dwemer Puzzle Box Quest

For the 6th or 8th time I have just cleared (I think) the dungeon where the puzzle box that I have to find is hidden. I can't find anywhere to use the rusty key. I made 1 character jump the broken bridge only to find that there was a difficult character there and it was a dead end anyway. As it's impossible to proceed until I have done this quest I am going frantic.

Roy Collins
E-mail

You're on the right track, but to make sure it's the right dungeon, I'll describe the location. Go south of the town, past the Silt Strider port, then take the bridge east over the Odai River. Turn north at sign post toward Caldera. Turn right at sign for Molag Mar, and go uphill until you come to a Dwemer bridge over Fovada Mamaca (who made up these names?) The first time you cross a summoning wizard attacks. The Arkngthand dungeon entrance is on the east side of the Fovada, south of the bridge. Inside, the puzzle box is in the Cells of the Hollow Hand. To get there follow the rocks on the side of the wall all the way to the bottom, turn west and you'll see a ledge. Climb up over some boulders to get to the ledge, go through the door and kill Boss Crito. The small puzzle box is on a shelf here.

Return to Hasphat in Balmora, ask about "favour", "Sixth House" and "Nerevarine". He'll give you information for Caius Cosades who'll send you to Sharn gra-

Muzgob (I ask again, who made up these names?) in the Balmora Mages Guild. Talk to Sharn gra-Muzgob about an "errand" (make sure you have Llevule Andrano's skull), expose her as a necromancer (search her stuff for evidence), then receive a spell from her as a hush bribe. Return to Cosades to complete quest and be promoted.

Command & Conquer: Renegade Mission 6: Rescue Your Team

I started off cruising through C&C: Renegade, but then I got to a most annoying spot. In the mission where u have to find Deadeye, once you've talked to him, you have to find/save Hotwire. When I go around the corner and get in the fire throwing tank, she always dies. How do I save her? Am I doing the first part of the mission too slow, or is there an alternate route I have to take?

Rowan Hamilton
Wollongong, NSW
E-mail

To succeed, the objectives have to be done in the right order. From where you start walk straight ahead, take 2nd left, and follow path. Go right and blow up the pile of debris. Hotwire is here. Follow path again. Go to town square and protect it from the Nod. Gunner in the bunker. Collect power up in house behind square.

After cut scene, cross bridge, keep going to barn on right. Here are 2 civilians and weapons. Keep going to alley, go up ramp on left and enter house. Talk to the Resistance on 2nd floor and escort them to crashed Nod chopper. Go downstairs to path, Mendoza appears. MAKE SURE you kill him - use mini-gun. At chopper collect



Bloody proctologist

weapons, power-ups and watch for Nod respawns. Follow road.

Enter house next to light tank, go up to 2nd floor. Look out window; use rocket launcher to destroy Nod buggy. Shoot the two Black Hand soldiers and destroy chopper with mini-gun. Use sniper rifle to kill ALL 6 engineers. Collect sniper rifle ammo and armour bonus. Outside, enter tank for a quick drive then exit at house on right to get information. Be ready when the guy stops speaking, for the Initiate turns into a Visceriod and Nod units appear. Next, drive light tank along road to the Fancy Inn where Deadeye's besieged on 2nd floor. Leave the inn, jump into light tank, drive down road and swap your tank with the unoccupied flame tank. At the end of the road disembark from flame tank; continue up the ramp on right. Drive past the cathedral and turn left. Enter the house and sneak in. Kill Nod forces here, talk to Babushka, collect weapons and power-ups. Drive tank back to the Cathedral, go inside. Talk to Patch upstairs. From the windows use rocket launcher to destroy mobile artilleries and chain-gun on choppers. Mission 6 ends.

Independence War II: The Edge of Chaos Walkthrough

Oh great Oracle, your humble servant needs your help. In act 1, I get a letter from the stepsons asking to meet, after a few deliveries I get a fake IFF code and get a lift to a place where the cargo is located. The trouble begins when I dock with the cargo: the base starts opening fire and destroys me before I can get away. How do I complete this mission without becoming space dust???

Frank Lydicksen

CODE

The Oracle shows you how to squeeze out every ounce of gaming goodness from your favourite games.

AMERICAN MCGEE'S ALICE

Cheshire Cat survives. When fighting the Queen of Hearts press C and the Cheshire cat will re-appear.

Cheat codes

Enable the console window in the game options. Then, press [Enter] + [~] during game then one of the following:
To spawn items : Give +
w_knife.tik
w_cards.tik
w_mallet.tik
w_jackbomb.tik
w_eyestaff.tik
w_icewand.tik
w_jacks.tik
w_blunderbuss.tik
w_demondice.tik
(Use multiple times to get all three Demon Dice)
w_ragebox.tik
w_watch.tik

To select level : Map + centipede1 or centipede2 facade

fortress1 or fortress2 funhouse
garden1,garden2, garden3 or garden4
grounds1 or grounds2
gvillage
hedge1, hedge2 or hedge3
jlair1 or jlair2
keep

pandemonium
potears1, 2 or 3
qlair
rchess
skool1 or skool2
tower1, tower2 or tower3
utemple
wchess1 or wchess2
wforest

Other cheats:

wuss: Get all weapons
god: Toggle god mode
no clip: Toggle no clip
give all: All weapons
health #: Set health level,
where # is number
cg_cameradist -45: First person view

cg_cameradist 128: Return to default view

fps <0 or 1>: Toggle frame rate display

notarget: Disable enemy AI

MAFIA

Easy money: At the casino bet negative money to get money every time you lose.

Free ride extreme mode:
Complete the game to unlock this mode which has new cars and no police.

COMMAND & CONQUER: RENEGADE

Enabling Extras: In multiplayer mode press [F8] and type "extras fnkqrmm" ("extras quantifigon" in unpatched version.) A message saying "Extras ENABLED!" should appear. Hold down Alt key while clicking on character or vehicles to bring up extras. These do not work in laddered games.
Infinite Skirmish Time: Use a text editor in the westwood/renegade/data directory and edit the "svcfg_skirmish.ini" file. Change "game-time" value to zero. Make backup before doing this.

MOBILE FORCES

Cheat mode: Press ~ during game play to display the console window. Type horsey to enable cheat mode. Then, enter one of the following console commands to activate the corresponding



cheat function:

god: God mode for character

teamgod: God mode for team

amphibious: Breathe

underwater

fly: Fly mode

ghost: Walk through walls

loaded: All weapons

setteam <0 or 1>: Toggle

team change

invisible <true or false>:

Toggle Invisibility

killpawns: Kill all CPU players

killenemy : Kill all enemies

killcars: Destroy all cars in

level

expirecars: Expire all cars in level

viewn: Change camera view to the next player

viewme: Change camera view to normal

setjumpz <number>: Set

jump height

setspeed <number>: Set

walking speed

setweapons <weapon name>:

Set weapon for each team member

summon <item name>:

Spawn corresponding item

INDIANA JONES & THE INFERNAL MACHINE

To activate cheat, press [F10] during the game and enter the following at the command window:

taklit_marion: God mode

urgon_elsa: All weapons

azerim_sophia: Health items

nub_willie: Hints

mem: Show memory

version: Show game version

polys: Show polygon rates

fixme: Free Indy if stuck in corner

toto: Machine gunner

makemeapirate: Turn Indy into Guybrush

deriver: Walk through walls

framerate: Show framerate

endcredit: View credits

horse: Horse for Indy

pop: Instant death

ORACLE

Frank, I hope you're stuck in Mission 4, Act 1, because if not, then I'm afraid space dust is your fate. You have to sneak into a base to steal some new navy fighters by switching them with another cargo pod. After Jafs gives you a lift to the Maas facility, hide in the dump and listen to Clay's advice. Remote link to the drone, dock to cargo pod that's labelled "Useful" on your contact list and take it to pod containing turret fighters. This easiest to do in external view, fly next to the fighter pod, then fly slightly past it. Next, undock from the "useful" pod and it will slide back next to the fighter pod. Dock to turret fighter pod, take it back to the garbage dump and undock it. Cancel remote-link (Shift R) again; Jafs docks to pod and transports it away. Once Jafs flies out of range, you've completed the switcheroo. There's a bonus after this - a wingman training course.

Indiana Jones & the Infernal Machine

I've made it to the 3rd level on Indiana Jones but I'm stuck on the rafting stage. I've found 2 bees wax candles but I can't find the other 2.

I know you only publish a few but I desperately need your help.

**Reece Anderson
Swansea Heads, NSW**

What a pitiful plea - how can Oracle resist? To get 4 candles, it's 2 trips down the Tian Shan River. With 3 repair kits you should have no trouble even if you do hit rocks. Take the first 2 left forks in the river; the first candle (green) is in a tower. Then head right, go under a bridge and stop by a cave. Go inside, pick up treasure and medicinal herb on ledge, then cross bridge, go downstairs to room with smashing blocks. Save game. Jump onto the first block at its lowest point, then jump to ledge, then do running jump to third block, then jump to ledge at right of tunnel entrance. Down this tunnel is the second candle (purple). Go back down the way you came. On your way down, look up and use whip on a hidden log (treasure).

On raft, go back under bridge, to a tunnel you passed before, go into that and stop at machinery. Get out, take the lift up. When lift stops, you're back where you started on the river - time for trip #2. This time take the first left fork,

then go right to a locked tower. Go upstairs, shoot through window, jump through and pull lever. Jump out and down to path. Turn right, keep walking to a medium sized ledge. Pull yourself up here, behind the door is third candle (red). To reveal a lever, shoot out window with pistol. Back on raft, paddle to the left and go through tunnel. Get out at a small riverbank and trees. The fourth candle (yellow) is in a tree stump along with treasure.

Get back on raft, continue down river through a long tunnel to lift, watch out for rocks on your left. Take lift back up to where you first started. Go back to the building that had 2 guards and find the intersection - go under the archway - to see a small structure with candle holders. Ahead are a windmill and bridge. Place the candles in the holders; use Indy's lighter to light them. Cross the bridge and you're done.

Return to Castle Wolfenstein Blues

In Return to Castle Wolfenstein I am stuck in the 2nd level in the yard where the huge usable gun is. There is no other way out except the door to the guards' quarters which is a dead end. Also in Deus Ex what are some good strategies to employ against groups and single guards?

**Christopher Koerntjes
E-mail**

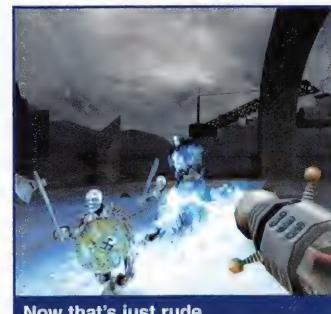
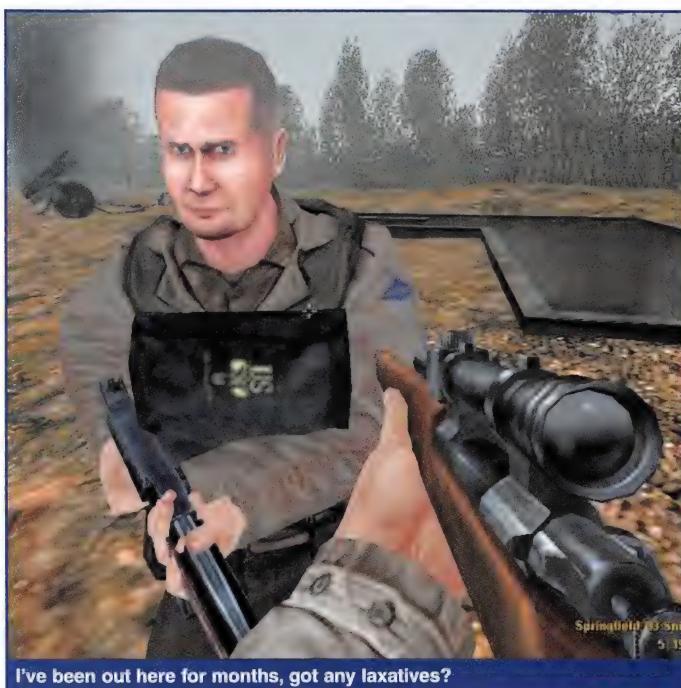
Oracle guesses you're looking for the tram so you can escape from the Castle. I hoped you used the "usable gun" on those pesky guards. Oh the power of the MG42! The guards' quarters downstairs on the

left and at the end of the courtyard have ammo and health kits inside. Return to the dining room, go upstairs, past the wine cellar and up another set of stairs. Take door on right, then door at end of corridor and you'll find yourself back in the first courtyard. Go between the 2 small towers; the double door will now be unlocked. Go through and you'll be on the bridge above the courtyard with the MG42 gun. Turn around and go up ladder to where snipers were hiding. Health and Mauser ammo are here. Door on right is to the tram.

Strategies for Deus Ex

Take your enemies by surprise, and go for head shots. Get weapon mods early and stick to a few rather than trying to carry 8 around.

The assault rifle is used as backup and against MIB agents. When a head shot's impossible, sneak up and use a riot, shock prod, or crowbar, or else tranquiliser dart. After a couple of seconds they'll drop to the ground. Crossbows are good for this. Later on, try and get 1 shot kills so the alarm isn't raised. Keep the assault rifle aimed at their chest as the recoil kicks it to the heads. Push aiming cursor down slowly so rifle keeps on target. Let your pals fight the bad guys first before you attack. The healing augmentation lets you heal during battle and it's a complete heal when you find a bioelectric energy restoring bot. Keep inventory items like multi tools and upgrade lockpicks and electronics to advance quickly. Sneak into rooms, don't burst in. Try to hide behind something and get enemy to come to you. Use 'lean' keys (Q and E) to peer around



CODE

corners. Need I add you should talk to everyone?

Medal of Honour Allied Assault

Mission 4: Behind Enemy Lines

I'm stuck where you have to find and rescue the pilot. I did that but I can't find the hiding place to take the pilot to. Do you know where it is?

Matty Manduday

E-mail

With the Resistance pilot, fight your way to the church, watching out for sharp shooters (they're behind a log wall, use grenades). Use the MG42 on the hill to kill the reinforcements that arrive. Once inside the church, kill everyone (so much for "sanctuary") and [USE] a coffin to reveal Manon's hideout.



Hello ladies



Hello... ladies



Hello... oh stuff it

AQUANOX

Right-click on the Aquanox desktop icon and select properties. In the target field press the space bar once and type Redrum Stendek. Click Apply and Ok and start the game.

Press any of the following keys during the game to activate the cheat.

- [F7]: Toggle invincibility
- [F8]: Toggle invisibility
- [F10]: Auto mission complete
- [F11]: Manual mission complete
- [F12]: Fail mission

Ini file cheat

Find the file Player_Start located in the directory Aquanox\Dat

To start playing as any ship find the line that says:

Ship = 1

Change the 1 for any of the numbers below to start with the corresponding ships:

- 2 for Drowsy Maggie
 - 3 for Avenger
 - 4 for Tiburon
 - 5 for Skipjack
 - 6 for Vortex
 - 7 for Succabus 2
 - 8 for Voodoo Breath
 - 9 for Phobo Caster
- To start with lots of credits find the line that says:
Credits = 240 and change "240" to any number up to 999999.

ALIENS VS. PREDATOR 2

Cheat Codes While in game press [Enter] and type " " (include the space after), followed with one of the following codes. Press [Enter] to enable code.
mpcanthurtme: God Mode
mpsChuckit: Add Weapons & Ammo
mpsmithy: Full Armor



mpkohler: Full Ammo

mpbeamme: Beam Player to Level Start

mpsixthsense: No Clipping

mpicu: Third Person View

mpTachometer: Show Speed Info

mpsizeme: Show Size Info

To change species, type

mpmorph +
marine duke ■ predalien
aripraetorian ■ queen ■ exosuit
lightpredator ■ mhawkpredator
heavypredator ■ predator
chestburster ■ eisenberg ■ runner
droppilot ■ convict combatsynth
apesuit ■ femalelabtech
grenadier ■ laboror ■ dunya ■ ai
ivan ■ ai ■ malelabtech ■ drone
sadargunner ■ obrian poguard
pulseriflegirl ■ railgunner ■ rykov
smuggler tamiko ■ guard ■ guard1
■ guard2 ■ guard3 ■ officer
scientist ■ harrison ■ merc1
merc2 ■ merc3 merc4 ■ scientist1
scientist2 ■ scientist3
smartgunner ■ malelabsynth
hazmat ■ scientistchief ■ pocofficer
■ mccain pulserifleguy ■
femalelabsynth ■ guardofficer

MIDTOWN MADNESS 2

No damage: During game play press [Y] and type "damagefree" Disable Timer and Checkpoint Arrows : Pause game play with [F2] and type "qq".

TOTALLY USELESS DVD CHEATS

GALAXY QUEST

Omega 13 option: To unlock without viewing the movie first, play the movie and skip to the last chapter. Return to the main menu to access this option.

Cast and crew interviews: In biography screen, highlight one of the pictures at the top and press Enter. Alien audio commentary: Change audio settings to "Thermian Dolby 2.0".

MARS ATTACKS!

Hidden screen: Under "Soundtracks" option in the main menu, there's a hidden screen with gibberish Martian commentary.

Mod Life

When out of the box just ain't enough

Half Life Desert Crisis

Given the current political climate and the events of recent history it's easy to see why the Middle East conflict provides plenty of inspiration for modders. Although its name might suggest otherwise, Desert Crisis fortunately isn't just another mod that rehashes this theatre of war in unimaginative ways.

Set in the not-too-distant future, DC focuses on three warring global factions: the UPKO (United Peace-Keeping Organisation), USA, and the Scourge of the Desert (a group of privately funded freedom fighters). All three factions claim to be striving for world peace, whilst holding a Desert Eagle in the hand at the same time. The premise is a trifle convoluted and stretches the bounds of credibility just to provide the game with three protagonists.

However, if the plot seems unrealistic, wait for the gameplay. Any mod in which a MP5K, railgun, and pulse rifle are part of the same selectable arsenal means that realism is heading out of the window, fast. With its jumbled mix of modern and futuristic weapons, DC is definitely not a mod for players who enjoy grittily authentic combat.

That said, there is plenty of action on offer for those players unconcerned by logical storylines and other similar minor details. Whilst the weapon selection seems hugely unbalanced at first glance, it is offset by a fun "perks" (special



abilities) system which tends to even things out and gives players plenty of choice when creating a character. Players will be able to choose from traditional enhancements such as increased speed and stealth. At the other end of the scale, more over the top ones such as Kung Fu Mastery or "Wootastic" will transform characters into something out of a John Woo flick, complete with unlimited ammo and gravity-defying moves.

Leaving the forgettable plot aside, DC's best feature is its RPG-style character customisation. Selecting different primary and secondary weapons, armour, perks, and physical appearance makes for plenty of variety in gameplay and adds longevity. Its unfortunate that DC's mission objectives (mostly limited to Deathmatch, Last Man Standing, and its variants), visuals, and 11 maps are not equally as strong.

3/5

For: Half-Life

Version: 1.1

Size: 105 MB

URL: www.desertcrisis.com



Syndicate Black Ops

As members of a shady syndicate, players are commissioned as hunter-killers, seeking out the errant, misbegotten products of biotech experiments gone wrong. This mod has above average visuals, good weapon selection, a particularly fun Bounty Hunter mode, but is somewhat buggy even for a Beta. The latest version offers a revamped and improved HUD. However, as the mod team is French, it may prove to be a bit inaccessible.

For: Half-life | Rating: 3/5 | URL: www.syndicateblackops.fr.st



Bystander

Players assume the role of either a lone assassin (whose mission is to take out an AI target) or a member of a team of bounty hunters out to stop the assassination. The catch is that the action takes place in a populated city environment (one of the maps being of downtown Melbourne) where all players and NPC civilians look alike! With a clever and imaginative premise, and being a homegrown mod to boot, we'll definitely have more on this mod in the future.

For: for Quake III | Rating: 4/5 | URL: bystander.ausgamers.com

with Derek Lee

Quake 3 Navy Seals: Covert Operations



Three years is less time than most people spend on their tertiary education. Yet, three years (or thereabouts) is how long Team Mirage has been at it with this commercial-quality total conversion. This latest release proves not only that the time has been well spent, but also that gamers have attention spans longer than ten minutes.

The title is pretty much self-explanatory. Players will line up either on a team of Seals or Tangos (military speak for targets or

hostiles). From there it's into the usual multiplayer modes or taking on the excellent assortment of team-based missions that are on offer. Among these are demolition, rescue, and assassination-based missions together with an excellent VIP survival and escort mode.

NS:CO features a top notch selection of brilliantly modelled real world weapons, most with alternate fire modes, recoil and muzzle flash effects, and attachments such as laser sights and silencers. Location specific damage and an authentic

physics model (meaning flashbangs will cause temporary blindness and deafness) means that NS:CO is overflowing with realism.

This is one mod which places a heavier than usual emphasis on teamwork. Thankfully, its supported by an exceptional radio system which makes communication between team mates a breeze. Although there are enough firefights on offer to keep action-hungry players satisfied, NC:CO really pushes the tactical line so that games often feel much slower-paced than they actually are. The end result is some extremely rewarding gameplay.

One thing which NC:CO has going against it is accessibility. Whilst the detailed and complex skill system makes creating and updating profiles hardly the easiest task in the world, it offers a balance and variety. Although players will theoretically have access to the entire arsenal, skill levels will determine proficiency and the ability to "unlock" some of the better weapons.

The modelling and texture work ooze professionalism and there are few weaknesses amongst the selection of maps. However, it's the gameplay which really sets NC:CO apart from the crowd. It looks set to lure players away in droves from FPS realism faves such as Counter-Strike and Urban Terror. It really is that good.



Battle Grounds

Just for a change, this war-inspired mod is based on the US Revolutionary War. Think our own Mel and Heath in *The Patriot*. Players can side with either the British or Colonialists and there are plenty of classes and authentic weaponry on offer. The usual CTF and Possession gameplay modes are featured at the moment but the one to wait for is Line Battle, which will recreate a full-scale frenzied battle charge. Certainly one to keep an eye on.



Train Hunters

You know a mod has really made it when there is a remake of it. Train Hunters is a remake of the hugely popular classic mod, Runaway Train. The aim is for players to seize control of moving trains with bonus points awarded for frags made whilst on or in control of a train. This latest version has all the fun of the original but adds new weapons (such as a brick cannon) and some new play modes such as King of Train. Worth a look for fans of the "original" and newcomers alike.

For: Half-Life

Rating: 4/5

URL: www.bgmod.com

For: Half-Life

Rating: 4/5

URL: th.fragoff.net

DVD GUIDE

Each month we try to incorporate a few of the changes people have asked for and issue 80 is no exception. For starters the cute little autostart sound has gone. Yippee! We've just added a Contents Archive to the Contents page so you can find what you want quickly without having to scour old DVDs. And, lastly, you wanted more demos. You got more demos. I think you'll appreciate why when you see the line-up. Do the words UT Tournament 2003 mean anything to you?

In fact, there are so many demos this month that we had to ditch the ModLife section completely! But that doesn't mean we don't have any mods for you. Oh, no. Following in last month's footsteps we've thrown in another silly amount of only the hugest mods available. Check out Mods Plus and look forward to more theming of other great games in future issues. We've got the best of Counter-Strike, NeverWinter Nights and many more coming soon. And you can thank the DarkDragonLord and his mighty cable connection for that!

The Trailers section has become so big that we've had to move it into Spotlight. By big I mean that we've included the CS Militia 2 Insane Quality movie for you. All 380 MB of it - w00t! Halo 2 also gets a big mention, as well as a return of wacky humour from those Summoner geeks.

The Bunker, as always, has a massive amounts of gaming utilities, free games, maps, skins, models and the rest. There's also an update for the NaPali mod in the folder which you won't find if you didn't read this. Told you I'd sneak things in. ;)

Also, get down with a L33T sp3aK translator, speed up your Net downloads, create your own autostart DivX CDs and much more in Utilities.

Paul A. Morris
Pic Master



FREE ANIME! Hellsing Episode 1: The Undead

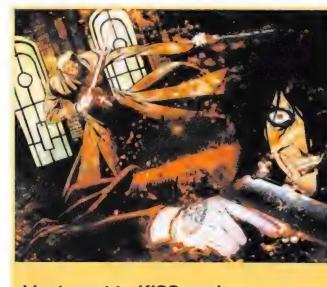
Distributor: Madman

Duration: 22 minutes

Notes: Works on a set-top DVD player or on a PC with software DVD player installed

A secret war is brewing in the night a war in which humanity is only a pawn. The mysterious Hellsing Organization deploys in the shadows to protect ordinary mortals from the undead legions who would prey upon them. Now, artificially spawned ghouls and vampires are appearing, stretching the Hellsing soldiers to their limits forcing them to call in their ultimate weapon the rogue vampire, Arucard!

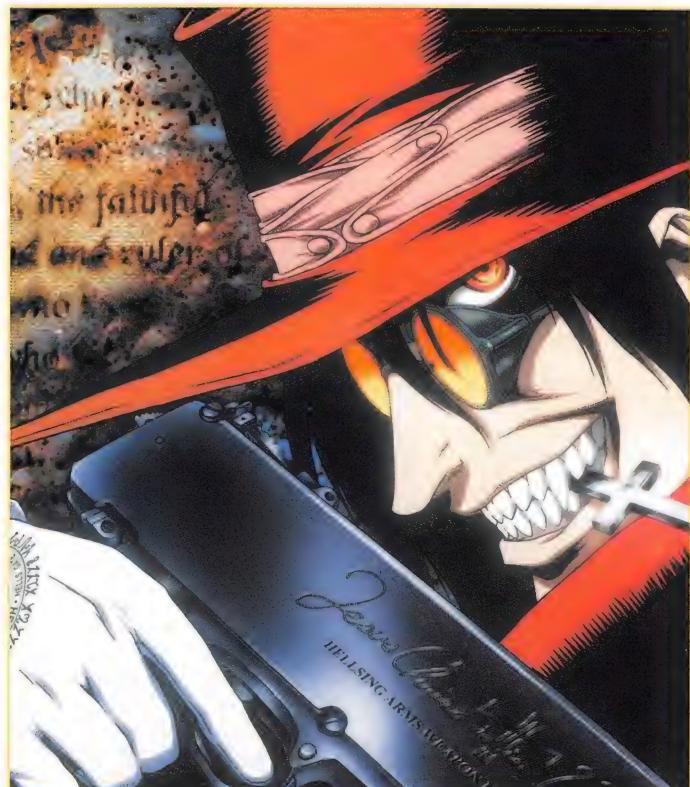
After saving young Seras Victoria, a Hellsing operative, from death by transforming her into a vampire, Arucard must work with her to fight the artificial undead army as well as her own newfound hungers! Click here for the full rap on Episode 1.



I just want to KISS you!



Kiss me, kiss me!



You should have kissed me

DVD POWERPLAY DEMOS



Haegemonia Rolling Demo

Pretty graphics.

URL: <http://www.haegemonia.com/>



NHL 2003

It's all about scoring.

URL:
<http://www.ea.com/easports/platform/games/nhl2003/>



Star Trek: Armada II

As it turns out, space is crowded

URL:
<http://gaming.startrek.com/games/armada2/>



Total Club Manager 2003

It's all about the game.

URL:
<http://www.totalclubmanager.com/index.php?class=1>

What you'll see or have seen in this presentation is an engine test - we could even call it a sort of benchmark - of the up-coming title Haegemonia: Legions of Iron. The visuals are absolutely stunning!

EA Sports prepares to ring in the new hockey season with NHL 2003. This year's version offers up: dynamic deke control, game breakers where the action slows during key moments, a new graphics and animation engine, new puck physics and goalie AI, four game modes, Create-A-Player, real on-ice sounds and more.

Combining elements from Star Trek Armada, along with more ship classes, more weapons, and enhanced 3-D experience. Star Trek Armada II delivers a richer, deeper, more innovative RTS game. The demo contains the first mission in the Federation campaign and one Instant Action and Multiplayer map, but save/load games have been disabled.

Need: Windows 9x/2000/XP, PIII 500, 64MB RAM, graphics card (TBA).

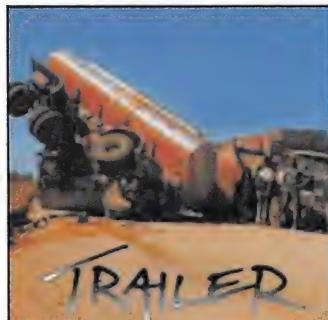
Need: Windows 9x/2000/XP, PIII 500, 128MB RAM.

Need: Windows 98/ME/2000/XP, PII 300, 64MB RAM, 3D accelerator.

Need: Windows 98/ME/2000/XP, PII 350Mhz - 64 MB RAM.

TRAILERS

Each month we endeavour to bring you movie trailers for games that have just been released, haven't been released yet and those which were supposed to be released but still haven't been! OK, true enough, they're not always late but that doesn't change the fact that we have to wait, wait, wait... This issue's in-game movies include: C&C: Generals, Halo 2, CS Militia, Team Fortress 2, Summoner 2.



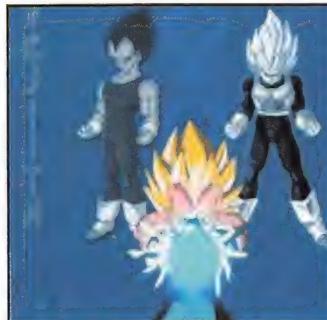
MODS PLUS

Following in last month's footsteps we've kept the themed mods coming. This issue's games of choice are Unreal and Quake3. Once again we've only covered the biggest of the big - apart from TETRIS, that is. That was just cos I'm a huge fan. ;) Included mods: Navy Seals: Covert Ops b1.1, NeoCairo 5.2, Strike Force 1.75, TETRIS umod.



GAMER FILES

This month's Bunker brings you more free games; some great gaming utilities - including 3D Mark 2001SE and PC Mark 2002; mappacks, skins and models for Battle Realms, Mechwarrior 4, RTCW and more; and a heady array of themes, screensavers and wallpaper.



UTILITIES

An A to Z mix 'n' match of must-have tools which will make your Windows life easier, while also saving you huge amounts of time in the process. From Acrobat Reader, for online documentation, to Winzip for file extraction, expect to find them all here. This month's new additions include: AutoDivx Player 3.30, Download Accelerator 5.3 and LEET Speak 1.2.



CD GUIDE

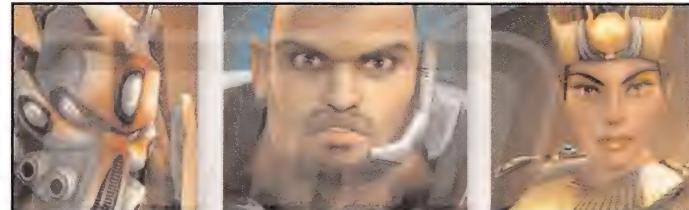
CD01 DEMOS

Unreal Tournament 2003

URL: <http://www.unreal-2003.net/>

You wouldn't shoot a lady...would you?

This is the demo for Unreal Tournament 2003, the anticipated sequel to one of the greatest first person shooters of all time. Four maps (2 DM, 1 CTF, 1 bombing run), and most of the weapons in the full game! With 100 times more polygons than the original Unreal Tournament, high resolution textures, a new particle system and 50 new player models this game will blow you away!



Another War

URL: <http://www.anotherwar.com/>

Excuse me, mate. Is this another war demo?!

Another War is a cRPG game with story localised in occupied Europe during WWII. The witty and humorous plot combined with the sophisticated character development system gives the player days of the addicting fun.



Bandits: Phoenix Rising

URL: <http://www.bandits-game.com/>

The unsung battle between man and the ecosystems he loves to trash.

The much demanded "BANDITS - Phoenix Rising" demo is here, featuring one single player mission, two MP maps for internet gaming via GameSpy, or LAN. The end is near; GRIN provide the means - you got three vehicles and a big whoping range of 13 weapons, as well as four phat music tracks to caress your eardrums!



Celtic Kings

URL: <http://www.haemimont.com/celtkings/>

They just don't build ruins like they used to.

Celtic Kings is a real time game that blends strategy, role-playing and adventure elements. There are two modes of playing the game that complement each other – adventure mode and strategic mode. The demo features a tutorial map, the beginning of the adventure as well as two maps playable against computer opponents or on-line friends.



Hitman 2: Silent Assassin

URL: <http://www.hitman2.com/>

Baldly going where no man has gone before.

Hitman 2's storyline begins in a Sicilian monastery. His attempt to distance himself from his violent past is detoured as he is discovered by a Russian crime lord and tricked into returning to his trade. Caught in the middle of a ring of deception, Hitman soon discovers that he has been manipulated and is now a target himself - of a highly trained ex-Spetsnaz assassin.



No One Lives Forever 2

URL: <http://www.lith.com/>

Acting lessons aren't part of the curriculum at spy school.

Tornado Trouble! Cate has come to Akron, Ohio, in search of clues relating to Project: Omega, an enigmatic Soviet plot that threatens to bring about World War III. When her mission takes a sudden turn for the unexpected, she finds herself in a trailer park with some spunky-looking ayiiiiieee-shouting ninja assassins all around and a tornado closing in.



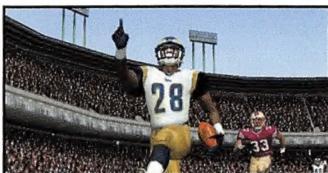
CD02 DEMOS, MODS AND PATCHES

**Crazy Taxi**

Are YOU looking at ME?!

URL: <http://www.sega.com/>**Emperoer: ROTM**

Town Planning - it aint easy

URL: <http://www.sierra.com/>**Madden NFL 2003**

Taxi!

URL:
<http://www.ea.com/easports/platforms/games/madden2003/>**Project Nomads**

Master of all he surveys.

URL: <http://www.radonlabs.de/>

Crazy Taxi is the recently released PC port of the console arcade racing game by Sega Entertainment. As a fearless cabbie, you're driven by a single goal: rack up the mega-bucks in fares and tips before your shift ends. To keep the meter ticking you've got to take the fastest route possible - even if it means using some different driving techniques.

Need: Unknown

Epic in scope, Emperor spans seven dynasties and more than 3,000 years of Chinese history — from China's pre-imperial Xia dynasty circa 2100 BCE to the Mongol invasion of the Middle Kingdom under Genghis Khan in 1211 CE. As Emperor you will build housing, attract immigrants and command your populus to build a provincial city into a great metropolis.

Needs: Windows 9x/2000/XP, PII 450, 64 MB RAM.

In its 13th year, Madden NFL Football is the undisputed leader in authentic NFL football simulation. Its combination of jaw-dropping graphics and animations, realistic player AI, in-depth play modes, and the most innovative features is beyond comparison. With a primary focus on in-game graphics and game play, this is the best looking, sounding and playing football game ever.

Needs: Win 98 - XP, IBM 400 MHz PII processor, 16MB vid card, DirectX8.1.

Project Nomads is a third person cross genre game that takes place in a fantastic world of huge, floating islands that drift slowly through the haze of the clouds. The player controls a Nomad - a human able to fly, mastering the art of magic and the relics of a lost technology. With his arcane powers and glittering, magical artifacts, he can build factories, powerplants and defense facilities on these massive platforms.

Needs: Windows 9x/2000/XP, PII 450, 64 MB RAM.

**Soldier of Anarchy**

There is nothing like a tank!

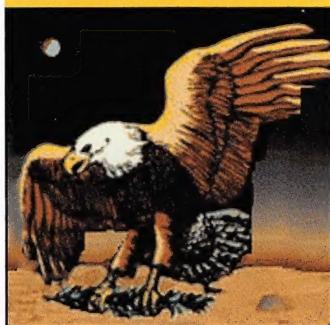
URL: <http://www.soldiers-of-anarchy.com/>

All that is left is hope, the hope of a new beginning. Follow us, to a time, away from all human civilization. Far away from law and order. Dive into a world of light and shadow, of fear and destruction. Start the fight against the chaos that could lead to our downfall. Protect mankind from its biggest enemy.... itself.

Needs: Windows 9x/2000/XP, PIII 600, 128 MB RAM.

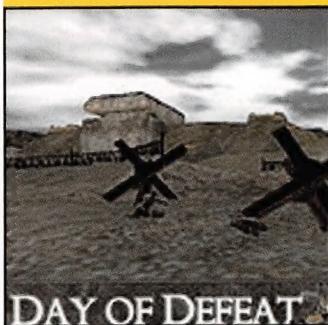
PATCHES

Patches are the bedrock of any game and essential to furthering its potential through the eradication of bugs. This month's selections are no exception. They include: America's Army: Operations v1.20 & 1.21, Battlefield: 1942 retail v1.1, and Battlefield: 1942 MP demo v1.1. There's also a much needed OS patch here - Windows 2000 Service Pack 3. Please refer to and read any online documentation before installing this patch.



MODS

DUE TO an unprecedented amount of demos this issue there is no disc space for the mods featured in this issue's ModLife section. We apologise and hope to return to normal programming in #81. At this time of year the game demos come thick and fast and making the decision as to what to leave off the CD is often a very difficult one.



DAY OF DEFEAT

As you can see, there's a lot more to the CDs this month. As you request changes, we do our best to accomodate them. Remember, theses are your CDs. We want to give you what you want, so keep the requests and constructive criticism coming in, and keep this hairy-footed little guy happy! ;)





I had become bitter. Recall, if

you can, all those months ago when, dangling from the cargo bay of a C-130 Hercules transport, twenty thousand feet above the Nevada desert, my crazy ex-third flatmate, in a selfish attempt to save his life and mine caused those famous yellow boots to plummet to the earth, leaving me with stockinginged feet, no job and after a few months of listening to the bitter sound of my whining voice, very few friends.

But it was worse than that, I became a LAN administrator. Don't get me wrong, I wasn't one of those cool guys with the electric screwdrivers who seem magically able to turn a draughty Boys Brigade hall into gaming utopia with nothing more than an enormous pile of blue UTP, a liberal supply of caffeine and sixty hours of back-breaking labour. No, I was the guy who sat up the back while the LAN was actually happening, scowling at the few women who dared enter this holy realm, sucking down can after can of Dr Pepper, and doing the occasional soda-fountain-refill canister of nitrous, just to take the curse off it.

Every now and then I would randomly select one of the sixty kids using the LAN to leach porn from his fellow LANners and boot him off the network for leaching porn. I would program the big LED marquee mounted on the far wall to say rude words, but have a perfectly normal message stored in the buffer so if anyone ever complained I could simply switch back to the non-rude message with a subtle keypress and then look at the complainer like they were mad or scum or both.

Occasionally I played games, but since the death of the boots I had let my gaming muscle turn into mp3-downloading fat, with the result that ten year olds sitting under the watchful eye of a mistrustful parent, running Q3A on a Hewlett Packard Celeron 366 were caning me. It was a dark time.

I blamed recent advances in network administration. There was actually very little for me to do these days, the network maintained itself perfectly well and most of my time consisted of me

Games that Bring People Together

A heartwarming tale of rediscovery and reunion

staring at the main fileshare server as all the porn being leached slowly throttled it to death, and then I'd press the reset button, put a message over the PA that the fileshare server was rebooting, and then open up another can of Dr Pepper.

On one of those interminable Saturdays, when all the players who bring any sort of artfulness to their Counter-Strike gaming had got bored and were playing actual real soccer with a real ball in the carpark outside, leaving the try-hard case modders with something to prove alone in a cancerous lump in the centre of the hall screaming obscenities at each other and thumping their mouses on their Everglide mousepads, I received a package.

This in itself was quite odd because Australia Post and I had never quite seen eye to eye following the incident with my crazy ex-third flatmate and the 2-litre Paul's Blue Ribbon vanilla ice-cream container full of homemade napalm. Nevertheless here was a chunky, slightly lumpy package delivered via that new Express Post Platinum thing they have where an actual courier tracks you down with unerring diligence to get the damn thing to you before midday regardless of your state of mind or consciousness. The courier on this occasion was, as you might have guessed, my crazy ex-third flatmate. He grinned and gesticulated at the package.

"Why do I get the feeling this is going to end badly for someone?" I asked, and with an air of finality used a \$250 crimping tool that I'd stolen from a Cisco engineer with bad teeth to rip the top off the Express Post satchel. I upended the bag onto the desk, and a pair of dirty yellow boots fell out. The boots and I stared at each other for a good moment. Then I nodded, very slowly.

With great care I bent under the desk and unlaced the still-gleaming (and insufferably smug) Timberland Seven Leaguers I'd finally

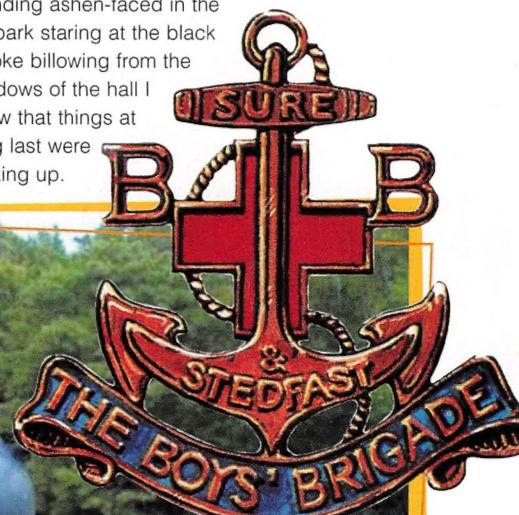
bought on one rainy Sunday, slipped them off, tied their laces into one big ugly knot and hurled them as hard as I could at the most excessively overblown neon-lit case in the farthest corner of the hall. Then I put on the boots. Then, after taking a final hit of nitrous, I leapt to my feet.

"LANs hey brother?" my crazy ex-third flatmate asked without even attempting to conceal his sneer. I nodded slowly again, then bent down to one of the terminals on the desk and typed a command, a very special command, a command every sysadmin knows but swears an oath on his most impressively painted Warhammer miniature never to use.

Every computer in the place exploded.

Through the smoke, the screams of rage, pain and heartbreak, through the slowly descending rain of bits of neon light, moulded plastic and fluffy stick-on material, I walked like a king. Like a returning hero. How this had come to be, I did not know. The story of the boots' miraculous return from the US via, no doubt, tramp steamer, pirate submarine and rare Columbian flying lizard filled barrel, could wait for another day. Today, I was back. Today I was going to drive around to the PCPP offices and demand reinstatement. Today I was going to show the world that comics are for kids and real men wear yellow boots and play computer games.

Unfortunately my crazy ex-third flatmate was coming with me, but not even that could take the shine off this moment of triumph. As we passed a group of soccer-playing gamers standing ashen-faced in the carpark staring at the black smoke billowing from the windows of the hall I knew that things at long last were looking up.



We thought we understood this image, but then we saw the penguin...

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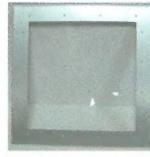
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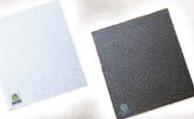
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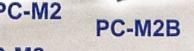
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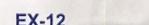
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